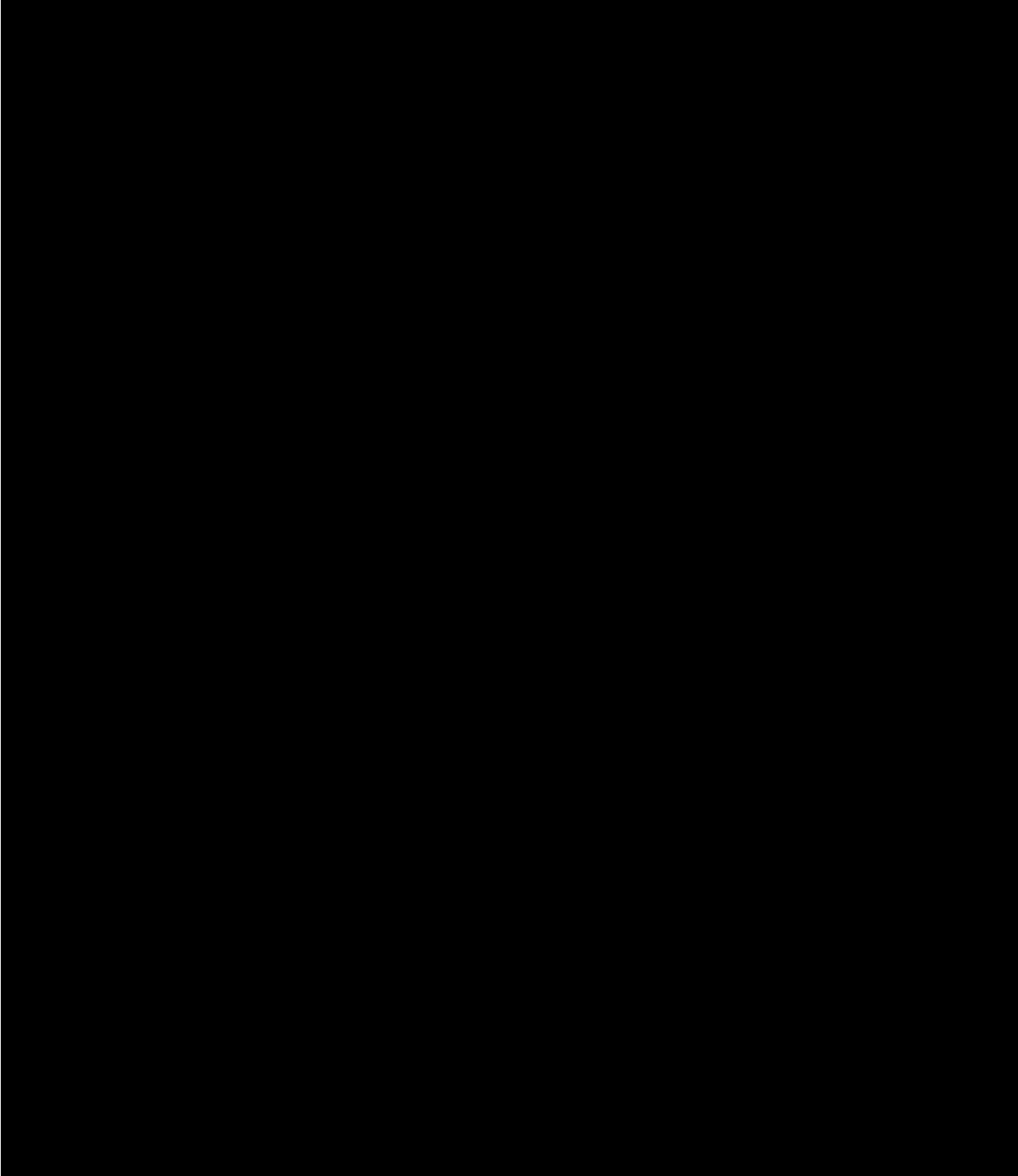


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These case studies were written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE) and to policies and programmes of the previous administration.

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Improving outcomes for disadvantaged young people

Case studies of effective practice

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Introduction

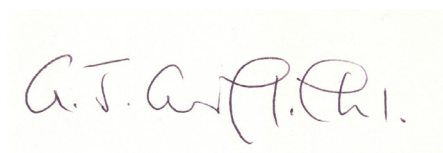
Learning from good practice

This publication sets out sixteen case studies of providers, who are working successfully to close the gap for young people aged 14-19 coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. In collaboration with YPLA, the Office for Public Management researched and wrote up the case studies.

In some case studies, mainstream providers are going ‘the extra mile’ to engage and support students from areas characterised by high socio-economic deprivation; in others, third sector, statutory and private providers are concentrating their efforts on specific sub-groups of young people who are often marginalised and suffering economic disadvantage, and require something more tailored than universal provision can offer.

The purpose of this booklet is to enable practitioners to share experiences of how they have tackled issues and overcome problems. It is not our intention to produce a ‘how to’ guide, rather it is to illustrate how different providers across England are tackling the achievement gap, including the challenges they have faced and the lessons they have learned along the way. By highlighting common success factors across the case study examples, we hope to offer useful learning to partners and all organisations engaged in seeking ways to address similar issues with disadvantaged young people.

The Young People’s Learning Agency is working with the DfE, local authorities and other partners to close the attainment gap, to improve outcomes for all disadvantaged learners and ultimately to shape a system that rewards worth not birth.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, reading 'G. J. Griffiths', on a light yellow rectangular background.

Gareth Griffiths

Head of Curriculum and Qualifications Policy

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Barnfield College

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Background

In 2005, Barnfield College approached the, then, DfES with the idea of sponsorship for two under-performing secondary schools in Luton as part of the Government's academy programme. In September 2007, the schools opened as academies and, along with the college, formed Barnfield Federation. The college was the first in the country to initiate and achieve this objective.

performing schools in the country and their GCSE results were poor. The schools had a high turnover of head teachers and were placed in 'special measures'.

Barnfield College's vision was 'to build Britain's highest performing federation, where all students are happy, successful and reach their full potential'. The primary aim was to raise standards, but the college also recognised that the federation model presented many

How it works

Over the last few years, Barnfield has developed a wide range of extra-curricular activities: encouraging and extending these has been fundamental to the college's success in narrowing the gap in educational achievement. The college has formed the After School Club, which aims to make learning fun, while highlighting the relevance of core subjects and providing direct links to the curriculum. Students at the After School Club can take part in different workshops depending on their areas of interest: from engineering and car mechanics to IT and make-up classes. The emphasis is on skills that might not be given full attention during school hours. For example, students learn how to perform well at interviews and how to write successful job applications.

The idea of re-engaging students and encouraging them to stay in the safe environment of school after lessons has paid off well. Teachers report that they have seen a difference in students' approach: they increasingly want to stay on track and obtain qualifications.

Barnfield College also participates in a national programme 'Vtalent' where 15 young volunteers aged 16 to 25 are placed in appropriate volunteering opportunities, linked to their interests, within different departments of the Barnfield Federation. The programme provides an opportunity to obtain level 2 qualifications and highlights its potential to increase students' chances when they apply for a course or job.

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unities to help more students. By widening students' vision of their pathways, the college has managed to increase progression to further study, Apprenticeships or employment.

Who attends

The student population at Barnfield College is very diverse, both ethnically and socio-economically. Migrations put many of them at risk of becoming second-generation immigrants. A large percentage of the students are Asian or Eastern European: for example, English is not their first language. Some students come from backgrounds who expect them to do well academically and progress to university, but all these students currently lack the skills that would allow them

Outcomes and achievements

- Both academies have seen an impressive improvement over the past two years: positive GCSE results have doubled and, in some subjects, tripled. Attendance and punctuality have greatly improved too.
- In 2009, all the GCSE students at one academy achieved five or more A*–C passes, 54 per cent of whom gained these grades in both English and maths. At the other academy, the success rate for five A*–C grades in any subject has risen from 19 per cent to 57 per cent in the previous two years, with 36 per cent of students achieving five A*–C grades including English and maths.
- In 2009, Barnfield College was awarded an Association of Colleges Beacon Award, recognising its exemplary initiatives in 14–19 collaborative arrangements and its work with the two under-performing secondary schools.
- Each academy recently underwent its first Ofsted inspection since opening, achieving 'Outstanding' and 'Good' ratings. The leadership and governance provided by the college at each academy was considered to be 'Outstanding'.

The college believes that the success of its students can be enhanced by input from their parents and carers. It has made considerable efforts to engage parents, for example, inviting them to weekend workshops and open evenings where parents, teachers and students can discuss the options for career progression.

From the start, the college has considered the relationship between the college and the academies as being vital to the successful progression of young people into further education. The Director of 14–19 at Barnfield states that, since many of the students from the academies move on to attend the college, it is crucial for teachers in both parts of the Federation to cooperate. She said:

"I've seen a tremendous increase in the strength of the relationship we've had with the academies and there is a substantial amount of knowledge that staff here and there share."

Increasingly, staff from the college are invited to the academies and vice versa, which makes them aware both of the local opportunities available to students at different educational stages and of different challenges and restrictions they face. Staff benefit from the relationship between the academies and the college by being supported as they increase their skills, and this in turn inspires them to play their part in ensuring the Federation's success.

The college also finds it important to develop contacts with other institutions. It has liaised with secondary schools in the Luton and Bedfordshire area through 'option evenings', where Barnfield staff visit to tell pupils about the opportunities available at the college. It has built a

close relationship with the University of Bedfordshire, which provides progression opportunities for Barnfield students and coordinates career events organised at the college. The college intends to strengthen this relationship by developing a programme, where able students from families with no tradition of higher education and students from areas of deprivation (identified by post codes) will learn how to use revision effectively and undertake research.

The college uses 'contextual value added' (CVA), a measure of students' outcomes that takes their background and prior achievement into account. The measure shows whether, at the end of Key Stage 4, a student has achieved what has been expected. The college also makes use of video to assess students' development of their 'softer' skills, which are difficult to measure through traditional methods. Students are filmed at Key Stage 2 and then again at Key Stage 4, and differences in their body language compared. This approach was developed in response to employer feedback that students often lack 'softer' skills, such as confidence, despite good academic results. Using video for this purpose has proved very popular amongst students and, in the majority of cases, their body language has become more positive and their confidence grown.

Learning and challenges

Like other educational institutions, Barnfield College faces the challenge of ensuring that all young people and their families get accurate careers information, advice and guidance. The fact that some students do not

have English as their first language can complicate this.

The college has also learned the value of consistent communication with schools and careers agencies, especially considering the ever-changing nature of qualifications on offer.

Partnerships with external organisations and employers pose different challenges but the experience of building such partnerships has been an important element in the college's success. According to the Director of 14–19 at Barnfield, developing staff relationships over a length of time helps build trust between institutions:

“You have to be able to see who needs to get involved and what needs to be done to make communication flow.”

When working with partners such as other schools, universities and employers, each partner's responsibilities need to be made explicit. If there are problems, partners need to communicate these honestly so that a shared solution can be developed.

Overall, Barnfield College has found the federation approach benefits all involved. Academy students have a place guaranteed to them at the college. Staff benefit from the close sharing of expertise and best practice. Having the college provide the 'back-office' support services for the academies through service level agreements, allows the academies to concentrate on individual student needs and raising outcomes through teaching and learning. The federation structure also provides greater financial muscle and a higher profile locally and nationally, positioning it well to respond to future developments.

The college attributes the outstanding success of the academies to a range of factors. As already mentioned, a focus on extra-curricular activities has been fundamental to motivating students and helping them learn. This is backed up with strong senior leadership, the involvement of students, staff and parents/carers in the community, the personalised support students receive, well-developed partnerships with employers, and investment in IT.

The Director of 14–19 notes

“As a college, we have to address the needs of such a range of young people: from those at risk of being completely disengaged to others who are highly gifted and talented. We need to recognise the skills of individual students and make them see beyond the next step they take: they need to see the bigger picture and make appropriate, well-informed decisions.”

Closing the gap messages

- Provide a range of extra curricular activities which help students develop their life skills and aspirations which might not be fully addressed in the classroom.
- Target support on students from economically disadvantaged areas or those from families with no tradition of going on to higher education.
- Provide accurate, up-to-date careers information, advice and guidance for students. This requires regular communication with schools, learning institutions and employers.
- Effective relationships with other schools and learning institutions will provide clear progression routes for students and opportunities to share practice.
- Close engagement with parents and carers ensures that they are involved and informed about the range of options available to their children.
- Engage with employers to understand their needs, involve them in curriculum development and respond creatively to what they say.
- Strong leadership, focused on the importance of narrowing the gap in achievement, is essential.

Busymummy, National

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Background

Busymummy delivers a home study programme and workshops for young mothers and fathers to re-engage them in learning and help them make a successful transition to education, employment and training.

The project began in 2005 when Busymummy was commissioned to work with the, then, Learning and Skills Council and Connexions in

Croydon to support teenage parents. At the time, the project relied on face-to-face meetings with young parents in the Connexions office. However, the approach did not seem to work.

In response, Busymummy came up with a home study programme called 'Me and My Education, Employment and Training'. In their own time, and with guidance from an individual learning coach, participants work

through booklets, which introduce and explain a topic and provide activities and questions for the students. It is up to the young parents what form of contact they have with their coach: most contact is by telephone or email, although they can also meet in person.

It is not only the use of distance learning that contributes to Busymummy's success. According to the company's director, a commitment to raising the aspirations of young parents underlies everything Busymummy does.

"A significant percentage of the young parents with whom Busymummy works come from a background of socio-economic deprivation and often their own parents became parents at a young age. Highlighting aspirations and life goals is most effective if we want to engage these individuals in education, employment and training and lead them into a professional direction that is right for them."

Initially, Busymummy struggled to make a difference because its focus on aspirations was not explicit enough:

"We needed to get hold of who each of the young individuals was and make them realise that they had an influence on their outcome."

Busymummy started operating nationally in 2007 and now runs its programme across the UK through partnerships with local organisations

Who attends

Young parents taking part in the Busymummy programme are aged between 13 and 20, with the majority aged 16 to 17. With social deprivation being a significant predictor of teenage pregnancy, it is perhaps not surprising that about 80 per cent of the young parents are on benefits and many come from families with long histories of socio-economic deprivation. As Busymummy expands nationally, it focuses its work in areas of most need.

Many of the young mothers Busymummy works with have more than one child, and one of the aims of Busymummy is to reduce the likelihood of subsequent unwanted pregnancies. Even though Busymummy works primarily with young mothers, it also does targeted work with young fathers. Staff at Busymummy are aware of the complex relationships between gender, age and parenthood, and they recognise that working with young fathers might sometimes require a different approach. At the same time, mixed workshops offer opportunities to consider relationship dynamics,

discuss parental roles and introduce communication techniques, and Busymummy offers a mix of single and mixed gender approaches.

How it works

Busymummy knows that pushing young individuals into training and qualifications as quickly as possible does not tend to have successful long-term outcomes. So it relates activities directly to young people's aspirations and provides a full coaching programme to support them. As the director says:

“A lot of young parents will assume that they have to go to ‘pre-defined courses’ such as social care or hair and beauty; a lot of them will say, ‘Whatever’. Our home study programme gives them time for reflection and to make decisions that are well-informed.”

Outcomes and achievements

- Busymummy has grown significantly since it was first set up in 2005, and has been running its programme nationally since 2007.
- Seventy-four per cent of Busymummy participants have completed the programme and successfully engaged in education, employment or training.
- Busymummy's focus on raising aspirations underpins the considerable success it has had working with young parents.

Busymummy's programme is based on solution-focused coaching, where participants first explore their life goals, then look at reality and finally take appropriate action. Coaching sessions cover topics such as understanding personal emotions, budgeting, child care and CV writing. They are very practical, but also develop young people's self-esteem and sense of personal agency without which young parents do not ‘buy in’ to the process. Busymummy has adapted the solution-focused approach and, over recent years, has gained a really good understanding of its client group and developed different progression pathways to suit the diverse group of young parents it works with.

Two eight-week series of workshops, ‘Ready to engage’ and ‘Preparing for college’, are regularly organised for young parents who need additional time to look at how they can overcome barriers.

Learning and challenges

A flexible and personalised approach is vital to working with young parents. Although many of them share a similar demographic profile, they have a wide range of needs and there is no single approach that will work.

Likewise, Busymummy operates flexibly at the strategic level, creating a bespoke programme for each region, in consultation with lead professionals in the area. Together, they consider regional variations, the support agencies available, and the different ethnic populations and cultures linked to the local children and young people's plan. At the moment, almost 70 per cent of programme participants

are white British and about 20 per cent are black African or black Caribbean.

For an organisation that is expanding through developing its work at a local level, it is crucial for Busymummy to build strong relationships with a range of strategic partners. Part of Busymummy's role is to inform users about opportunities available to them and, to do this effectively, staff have to be well-informed and well-advised. Working with partners helps here. It also helps with logistic challenges that emerge locally. Running workshops in unfamiliar areas with difficult access, for example, is far easier if knowledge and expertise is shared with local partners.

Isolation of young parents is a significant challenge, requiring a programme suitable for work with individuals who are hard to reach. Some young parents have a history of isolating themselves and of not engaging with education and other services. Busymummy approaches them in a way that is not over-bearing and does not make unreasonable demands of them. Busymummy's director explains:

“We don't say, ‘If you do this, you have to engage in education, employment and training’. A tremendous number of young people do engage, but that's because we take it gently.”

The director emphasises that programmes to re-engage young parents in learning must be based on the young people's aspirations:

“You really need to pin your work on their aspirations. Once you've done that, their passion drives it.”

Identifying ways in which young parents are more likely to engage is vital. For example, if young people regularly use

Facebook, this might be a useful tool to reach them. At the same time, there needs to be a strong on-the-ground presence, encouraging young parents to be involved in designing their own learning programmes and agreeing to abide by them.

Busymummy has a clear picture of how it wants to develop in the future. First, it wants to increase its presence nationally. Second, it is going to increase its portfolio of workshops to broaden delivery to include more family learning opportunities and introduce Apprenticeship programmes. Finally, Busymummy is at an early stage of developing a website for teenage parents with the aim of reaching 12,000 users. This website will enable young parents to access specialists such as health visitors, sexual health professionals, careers advisors, learning mentors and parenting specialists and take part in online discussions.

Cl messages

- Consider one-to-one coaching as a powerful way of raising young people's aspirations.
- Give young people the time and encouragement to really think about what they want to do and don't assume that this will be 'the usual' courses such as hair and beauty or engineering.
- Be sensitive to diversity among young parents – shared demographic characteristics do not mean shared goals and aspirations.
- When establishing a new project in a region, collaborate with well-informed local partners.
- Use a range of ways of communicating with young people, such as social media, telephone and email.

Choices 4 All, London

Contact

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Background

Choices 4 All (Choices) is a charity in Harrow, North West London, created in 1997 to develop and deliver training for people with learning disabilities, a group with historically very low levels of employment. It aims to help its learners acquire comprehensive skills which can help them move into employment, further education and/or independent living.

Choices has achieved Approved Training Provider status to deliver Skills for Life, and has been involved in a Foundation Learning pilot.

Who attends

Choices is exclusively for people with learning disabilities aged 16 or older. Learners are referred by Connexions, social services or they refer themselves. To be eligible, learners have to have at least entry level basic skills. Choices can support a maximum of 46 learners, and maintains a regular turnover to allow as many students as possible to benefit from the programme.

Recently, there have been more learners with autism or Asperger Syndrome coming to Choices.

According to Choices' 2009 Ofsted report, around 80 per cent of its government-funded learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with around 35 per cent locally. Choices has a good reputation among the clubs that carers and students attend, many of which are 'culturally singular'. Along with Connexions, it has been active in identifying minority groups and encouraging them to come to Choices.

How it works

Choices takes a person-centred approach, by designing its training based on the needs and learning styles of individual learners. It also encourages 'active learning' by focusing on what learners can do rather than on their cognitive impairment and what challenges them. It identifies and builds on the learner's strengths and tackles any access issues that could preclude the learner from getting the most out of the training programme.

Choices' approach is to treat the students as they would be treated in the working world of developing their employability skills.

Before they sign up, learner encouraged to go on a two week taster course so they can try out the different elements that make up Choices' Foundation Learning programme. There is no pre-requisite to the full Choices programme as the vast majority do.

The idea behind the taster is that it puts the learner in control of their own lives, possibly for the first time. During this course, the team make it clear to potential learners that they will be expected to take responsibility but will be in control of the individual study programme and can change elements of it providing so for sound reasons.

Because the taster is only two weeks long, the fear of starting something new and unfamiliar is reduced, allowing the Choices team to

learners and highlight their strengths, especially those which they might not be aware of. The taster starts the process of acquiring self-determination skills that are not readily held by learners with a learning disability.

Choices focuses on Foundation Learning, as it is more relevant to its learners than GCSEs, Diplomas or Apprenticeships.

Choices has its own catering area where

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and can also be a useful employment skill: interested learners can go on to attain a City and Guilds qualification in hospitality and catering. The catering area is also used to teach learners about food hygiene, health and safety, how to work as part of a team and how to operate industrial equipment, all of which are skills transferable to other areas.

Choices also provides work experience and supported employment as a means of consolidating these skills. It has its own dedicated 'job broker' who helps learners identify what sector

they might like to work in and how to obtain the necessary job skills. The job broker will also work with them on putting together a CV, interview techniques, carrying out job searches and completing applications and will accompany learners to interviews.

Choices continues to support learners after they have taken up a job by training them in the workplace so that they can learn at their own pace. It also supports the employer and its existing workforce, especially where they have not worked with someone with a learning disability before. This support can make the difference as to whether an ex-student retains their employment or not.

For those whose basic skills might preclude them from working in a traditional environment, Choices has set up its own social enterprise called Moveable Feast which delivers buffets to diverse organisations with equally diverse dietary requirements. Moveable Feast provides learners with work experience that allows those who need it more time to practise their skills, always with employment or further training as the final goal.

Choices' AGM is used as a public meeting which parents are encouraged to attend so that they can meet with other parents and see the presentation of motivational certificates to learners. Feedback from the learners is positive as the following extract demonstrates:

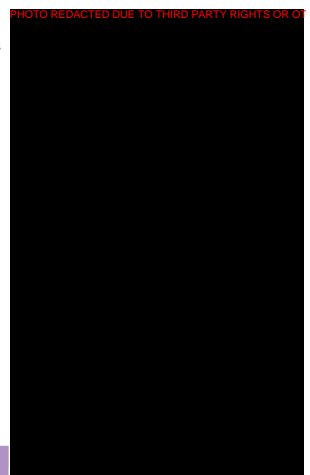
"My name is Kara and I am 20 years old. [...] At Choices I have gained a lot of skills and experiences but I think the most important to me has been travel training. I felt really proud to be travelling by myself. The first time I travelled by myself I made a mistake by staying on the bus too long and missing my stop. But I managed to

discover my way back, with Choices staff on the other end of my mobile. I'd learnt a procedure for if I got lost. No-one had to come and get me and everyone congratulated me when I got to Choices that day. This has made a really big difference to my life. When I have passed the travel training I hope to visit shopping centres by bus. Independently. My attitude has changed quite a bit I have become more confident now. I still have a bit to go, like going home by myself, but I am positive with that. I also hope to succeed in training others. I feel really proud and free."

A major focus for Choices is circumventing the hurdles that get in the way of learning. One of the main hurdles is that young people with learning disabilities learn at a far slower pace and need a lot of reinforcement. To help students overcome this and be more independent, Choices developed a small book of written instructions, photographs and symbols, which covered all the tasks involved in a person's employment. This ensured that a student was not at a loss if he or she had forgotten how to do something and did not wish to ask a work colleague for help. While this approach worked for some students, it did not suit those with reading difficulties such as dyslexia. So Choices decided to use MP3 players as well. This gives control to the students: they can listen to a recording as often as they need to, and because so many young people have MP3 players, individuals do not feel out of place amongst their peers. Allowing students to record classroom lessons also helps to overcome reading difficulties: they can retain more, which enables them to learn with confidence.

Outcomes and achievements

- Learners acquire a belief in their ability to learn, which can then help them develop new skills and unearth their ambition and potential.
- Coming to Choices increases learners' self-esteem and confidence. This is complemented by the key skills of decision making and problem solving, which are important both for working and independent living.
- When parents first have contact with Choices they tend to have low expectations of their child, but by the end of the Choices programme, most can barely recognise their child when they see how their skills and abilities have changed.
- Employers, Choices and agencies, as well as learners and their families, benefit in a mutually reinforcing way.



Learning and challenges

The chief executive of Choices has significant experience of working with people with learning disabilities and knows that those around them, including sometimes parents and special schools, often have low expectations of what they can achieve. She knows that it is not possible to ignore the hurdles that people with learning disabilities face but that it is important to find ways to circumvent these so that young people can realise their potential. Choices finds that it often has to spend time 'de-institutionalising' its learners as they have not been set boundaries or been taught the social skills they need to function in society and the workplace. This might include helping a learner understand that it is not appropriate to walk into a room when a meeting is going on, or to develop the skills required to deal with conflict.

Choices feels that the key to its success is being person-centred and giving the learners choice and control. It is important to listen to the students and design a service to suit them. For example, training in using email was built into the programme in response to learners' requests. When the Foundation Learning pilot began, it became clear that email was an important part of that, and this was something Choices already had in place. Choices also learned, from observing students, that they needed a strategy for ensuring their students do not access inappropriate Internet sites. This was developed; it has also been demonstrated to parents so they know how to keep their children safe when using the Internet at home.

Choices has also learned that it cannot work alone. It works with learners' families to ensure any learning is reinforced at home. It works with employers to ensure employment opportunities are there. It has also learned that continuing to support employers and learners after the learner has started work benefits everyone: employers get help with training, learners are more likely to stay in work for longer, and the 'progression rate' for Choices improves too. In-work support for the learner helps ensure that learners get the necessary training to take up new tasks. In addition, the more Choices can show that it is successful in placing learners in sustainable employment, the more learners will join their service and the more employers will sign up to offer opportunities.

Choices also works with agencies that students come into contact with, such as social services, the police and referral agencies like Connexions.

Choices has developed contacts with a number of employers, including national and international companies, local charities and schools who provide learners with work experience, voluntary work or more permanent paid positions. Getting students into employment can be difficult and requires continual relationship building with employers. Choices feels that the positive presentation of students on its website helps to dispel negative perceptions about the employability of people with a learning disability.

Closing the messages

- When working with young people with learning disabilities acknowledge and build on their existing skills and what they **can** do, rather than focusing on what they do not know and cannot do.
- Offer personalised learning, where learners have choice and control over their study programme, possibly for the first time in their lives.
- Introductory 'tasters' – that allow learners to experience a course before committing themselves to it – can allay any fears about starting something new and unfamiliar.
- Circumvent barriers to students' learning.
- Work collaboratively with those who interact with learners outside your learning environment. This includes learners' families, who can reinforce learning at home, and employers so that they understand the young people's needs and can support them in the workplace.

Explore, East Riding

Contact

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Background

East Riding Training Services (ERTS), part of East Riding of Yorkshire Council, is a work-based learning provider delivering Entry to Employment (E2E) and Apprenticeships. It also has a responsibility for reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the area by re-engaging them with learning.

The origins of Explore go back to 2008, when ERTS successfully piloted a re-engagement programme in Goole, an area of high economic deprivation and a NEET 'hotspot'. Following this, ERTS secured European Social Fund money via Humber Learning Consortium to design and run the Explore re-engagement programme with 40 young people in Bridlington, an area with a similar economic profile to Goole. However, once up and running, it became evident that this type of re-engagement programme was also needed in other economically disadvantaged parts of East Riding, and so the programme was extended to work with a further 40 learners in nearby Haltemprice. Since then, ERTS has secured another contract to offer a further 10 further places in Goole.

Who attends

Learners are aged between 16 and 18 and are referred by Connexions from its NEET register. ERTS then interviews each young person and decides with them whether Explore would be an appropriate route for them. Once on the programme, a comprehensive

initial assessment helps to devise an individual learning plan for each learner. The assessment process comprises

- a Skills for Life initial assessment which ensures that the methods and styles of teaching are appropriate for the learner
- a vocational assessment to assess employability skills and the learner's preferred area of employment. Results of this assessment are used to help with individual job search
- a social skills assessment which is used to determine individual needs and support requirements
- a 'know yourself' self-assessment which gives learners and ERTS the opportunity to establish a starting point. The self-assessment is repeated at the end of the programme to demonstrate progress each learner has made

Just over 60 per cent of the learners are male (reflecting the gender split of the NEET list), and the majority of learners are white British, which reflects the ethnic make-up of the region. Those who sign up to the programme tend to have had negative experiences of education in the past and dropped out of post-16 education. ERTS has noticed a variation in young people across the areas it works: those in Bridlington have low or no GCSE passes, while some of those in Haltemprice have higher grades but still lack confidence or experience other barriers to learning (such as alcohol or drug dependency). Based on anecdotal evidence, the

project manager feels that this may reflect the different socioeconomic characteristics of the areas.

How it works

The programme runs for 11 or 12 weeks in Haltemprice and Goole. Explore's aim is to help the young people progress to education or employment.

Learners attend for two days a week. One of these days is spent in a local centre and focuses on work-related activities such as employability skills, job applications, interview techniques, ICT skills, options for self-employment and discussions about what learners plan to do when they leave the programme.

In contrast, the second day involves a fun educational activity or visit: the idea is to excite and engage the learners, build a sense of group

cohesion and demonstrate that learning can be fun.

The programme usually begins with a visit to an outdoor training facility on the North York Moors, where the young people get involved in activities like archery, the zip wire and team building exercises, to help them gel as a group. Other activities include scaling a climbing wall, cycling and a visit to a local fire station for fire fighter training. These activities and visits combine an element of fun with team building and life skills development.

The project also invites external speakers and groups to give talks and presentations on topics as varied as 'working for the army' and 'sexual health and drugs awareness'. The project finds that these can be a good method of engaging learners who might have been out of education for some time. Presentations and visits by employers encourage learners to think about progression towards employment.

The project also delivers two one-day accredited courses: one in first aid and the other in health and safety. At the end of these courses the learners leave with a certificate as well as the Explore achievement certificate.

Learning and challenges

The project has learned that there are three crucial elements to its success. The first is having the right staff: people who have a genuine empathy with learners, who can engage with them and earn their respect.

The second is having an attractive programme of activities. ERTS constantly evaluates its activities

through written learner feedback and regular learner group meetings. If an activity is not popular with the learners it is dropped. In this way, ERTS has developed a very good understanding of the activities that young people are likely to engage with.

The final key to success is providing transport. ERTS has a minibus so that the learners can get to and from the centres, and this has been particularly important in the Haltemprice area where the learners are so dispersed; it would be difficult for them to reach the programme by public transport. The need to provide transport was highlighted by the pilot programme, and so ERTS included the costs of it in its European Social Fund bid.

Getting the various centres and external groups involved has not been difficult, as many already work with young people. It is important, however, to ensure that these partner organisations are well aware of the types of young people who will be attending, and the kinds of behaviour they are likely to display. Explore programme staff accompany the learners to deal with any discipline issues.

The greatest challenge that the Explore programme faces is making initial contact with young people and getting them signed up to the programme. Even when they can get hold of the young people by phone, it can be difficult to encourage their participation, especially those who have become thoroughly disengaged from learning. ERTS has changed its referral process in an attempt to address this and now works much more closely with Connexions to contact and engage with learners on the NEET list. Initial contact is made by letter

Outcomes and achievements

- The Explore programme has succeeded in reaching take up targets to date.
- 80 per cent of learners who have completed Explore have achieved the aims of the programme.
- 85 per cent have achieved an accredited Health and Safety Award, and 69 per cent have achieved their non-accredited Individual Learning Programme.
- Positive progression, which is measured as having progressed to either employment or enrolment in another form of training or education within six weeks of finishing the Explore programme, is running at 54 per cent.



and this is followed up by a phone call. Joint working with Connexions has ensured that, to date, the number of young people recruited has met the requirements of ERTS's contract. Nevertheless, recruiting young people to the programme remains an ongoing challenge.

Learner feedback has been very positive. Most learners find the activities the most enjoyable parts of the Explore programme, and find them 'informative and fun'. Many also say they have learned how to get on with others, work as part of a team and make new friends, thanks to the programme. Some have commented that taking part has improved their confidence and given them a reason to 'get up in the morning'.

One learner, who had previously been in trouble with the police, won an Award for Most Improved Learner from the Humber Learning Consortium Celebration of Learning and has since moved on to the ERTS E2E programme and has a part time job. She said:

"I really enjoyed (Explore), that's why I attended all the time and had 100 per cent attendance. I achieved Appointed Persons First Aid and the Shining Star Award and was really pleased with myself."

Closing messages

- Design programmes that engage and enthuse young people as a precursor and stepping stone to more formal learning opportunities.
- Combine vocational learning opportunities with fun, group-based activities that excite learners, help them gel as a group, and develop their life skills.
- It is important to have staff with the required skills, experience and empathy to engage with disengaged learners and respond to their needs.
- Recognise and remove (where possible) structural barriers that can limit learners' participation. An example is providing transport for the young learners who could not attend without this.
- Recognise learners' achievements whether these are accredited or not, as a means of motivating them. This could include producing your own 'achievement certificate'.

Find Out About Learning, Surrey

Background

Find Out About Learning (FOAL) is a five day programme designed to encourage young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) back into learning by making learning fun. The main aim of the programme is to progress

FOAL is run by a range of work-based learning providers in the region with the expertise to assist the learners on to Apprenticeships and Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes.

FOAL is funded through the Association of Learning Providers in Surrey Partnership Limited (ALPS). ALPS is a non-profit-making company dedicated

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providers offering programme each proach, but all pportunities n building, career ent, problem of different training ealthy eating.

s offering FOAL is ing Limited (MIT) ch is the focus of was established in iver to the motor it has developed ing such as er service, sports g and electrical y MIT offers E2E nticeships and eships in the above FOAL programme

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Who attends

FOAL is available to 16 to 18 year olds, MIT also offers it to a small number of 19 to 25 year olds, covering the cost of these older learners itself.

In 2009 MIT ran five funded FOAL groups, with 10 to 15 learners in each.

The local area is predominantly middle class and white. However, there are pockets of economic deprivation and learners represent a mix of social classes. What they all have in common is that they have become 'stuck in a rut', with nothing to occupy their time. Many have dropped out of school. FOAL aims to appeal to this group of disengaged young people by showing them that they can still learn and that there are options available for them to progress.

MIT has its own dedicated recruitment team who visit Connexions, Job Centres, school fairs and anywhere where there are young people, in order to recruit young people to their courses, including FOAL. Recruiting young people is not difficult as MIT markets its training courses widely and is well known in the area to employers and the general public alike. When MIT plans to run a FOAL course it is announced to Connexions and recruiting can begin. Currently there is a waiting list of 35 young people keen to join future FOAL programmes.

How it works

The learners attend the course for five days over a two-week period. When they first arrive they are given an introduction to the centre, including a tour of the premises, a discussion of the rules and an introduction to health and safety. Over the rest of the course, the learners take part in a variety of fun activities designed to develop 'soft' skills. FOAL is not about CV building or job searches – which come later with progression to E2E – but concentrates on motivating the young people and suggesting reasonable pathways for them to follow. The course leader describes FOAL as a 'feel good course'.

Early on in the programme the learners are asked to pick the person they find the most intimidating, stand next to them and get to know them. The purpose is to show learners that they should not judge people on appearances; knowledge which they can use on the first day at a new workplace or on a new course.

Another activity involves designing a board game for six to ten year old children: this helps to develop skills in team working, presentation and decision making through the

consideration of design, cost, manufacturing, marketing and selling. Working as part of a team also means that the young people learn from each other, and are less teacher-led.

Other activities are also aimed at developing team building, bonding and learning the importance of trust – through, for example, seeing how many learners can stand on a phone book at once – and developing dexterity by putting as many nuts and bolts together as possible in the shortest time.

Above all, the activities are fun and do not initially feel like learning, but ultimately demonstrate that there are more ways to learn than traditional classroom methods and that the young people are capable of learning.

Another important benefit of the course is that it provides the learners with a daily routine, an important first step in engaging with education and training opportunities, and progressing towards employment. At the end of the course the young learners are interviewed and assessed, to explore how they want to progress. They might, for instance, want to join an E2E programme, start an Apprenticeship, find a job or go back to further education: it's their choice.

MIT provides its own progression opportunities such as E2E and Apprenticeships, but will also help learners find the course they want with another provider through the ALPS network. Last year MIT helped find a tree surgery course for two learners who had started a motor vehicle Apprenticeship but changed their minds part way through. If learners are still unsure of what they would like to do at the end of the FOAL course they can attend one-day taster sessions on any of the courses run by

MIT. These taster days are invaluable to young people who need more help in deciding on their future. Once a decision has been reached, MIT continues to help by making a referral on behalf of the young person or by letting past students return to use their IT facilities for CV writing or job searches.

MIT is so pleased with FOAL that it has adapted many of the activities for its E2E programme induction course.

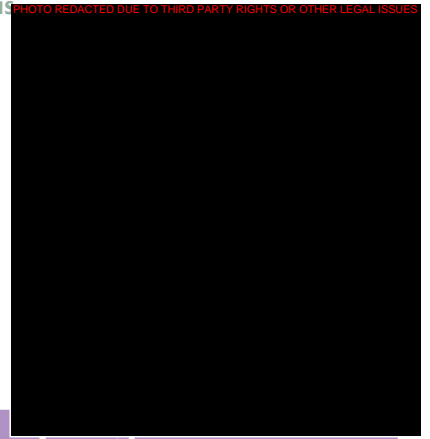
Learning and challenges

The first challenge of delivering FOAL was deciding how to run it. The guidelines from ALPS stated they needed to provide five days of fun learning. Originally MIT had designed FOAL as a very structured format focusing on a single sector – the motor vehicle industry. However, it soon discovered this focus meant that the course was covering the same skills as the E2E programme and did not pay enough attention to developing 'softer' skills like team working and confidence building. MIT therefore decided to develop a non-sector-specific course. It finds that the FOAL courses demonstrate the value that young people who are particularly disengaged from learning can gain from a short programme of fun learning activities and support. This can provide a firm foundation for moving on to more formal programmes and learning.

Another challenge has been funding. MIT delivers FOAL until the funding it has been given runs out. However, because MIT thinks that FOAL is such a successful and positive programme it also runs a few groups each year which it funds itself. As well as benefiting

Outcomes and achievements

- In 2009 MIT supported more young people through the FOAL programme than any other provider in the South East of England.
- The feedback MIT gets is also positive, with learners saying they like FOAL because it is fun and because they learn.



more learners it also benefits MIT: more young people coming through its doors may well lead to learners joining its other courses.

MIT feels that the secret to the success of FOAL is providing something fun but structured that the young people want to come to. It also feels that fun activities that show young people that they are capable of learning is how they get the learners to keep coming back. The most challenging group to retain have been young people who are home schooled as they have little experience of mixing with other young people and so find the group setting daunting.

What do the learners have to say?

Holly, aged 17 and interested in doing a motor vehicle Apprenticeship, said she enjoyed the course because the classes were smaller than the ones she attended at school and she liked the fact that the course required commitment from her:

“If you’re late they send you home. I like that. I was always late for college as I couldn’t be bothered. Here, if you know you’ll be sent home if you’re late you make the effort to turn up on time.”

She was surprised at how much she enjoyed the course:

“I thought I’d come for two days and not come back, but I’ve loved it. I love the people here and the tutor.”

She also said she thought the course had boosted her confidence and made her feel less nervous around new people.

Another learner was 17-year-old Fraser. He, like Holly, liked the structure of FOAL and talked about how friends of his had attended a course elsewhere where they could come and go as

they pleased and how nothing was said to them if they broke the rules. He did not like the sound of that. He preferred MIT’s approach as it was more professional. He really liked the fact that he now had a routine and something to get up for:

“Now I get up at 9am and come here. I feel like I’ve achieved something with my day. It fulfils you. Doing nothing all day at home is boring. It makes you feel useless.”

He also felt the course had taught him useful skills, like communication skills, which would be useful when he moved on to another course. Other learners that we spoke to said they’d developed ‘team work and leadership skills’, ‘trust’, and they felt ‘more confident’ already, only halfway through the course.

MIT has also had feedback from parents. The course leader recalls one impressed parent writing in to ask:

“What have you done to my son? He came home and did the washing up. He’s never done that before.”

Closing the gap messages

- Motivate learners by making learning fun and build their belief that they are capable of learning and achievement.
- Use fun, group-based activities to develop interpersonal skills such as team working, trust and presentation skills.
- Communicate clearly your expectations about young people’s participation, and back this up with action when these are not met.
- Encourage and support young people to progress to further training or learning, including opportunities to do so with the same provider.

Greenspring Training, Birmingham

Background

Greenspring Training is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It was established in 1982 to provide vocational training for 14–19 year olds with special learning needs from disadvantaged groups and for those from ethnic minority groups. It works with young people from areas of considerable disadvantage characterised by high levels of generational unemployment, low levels of adult education, gangs, weapons and drugs crime. At first based in the grounds of the Bishop Latimer Church in Winson Green, it moved in 1986 to a former factory in Hockley (an inner city district in Birmingham) and started to provide occupational programmes leading to nationally recognised qualifications such as NVQs in administration, engineering and woodwork. In 2007, it opened an additional training centre in Sandwell, West Bromwich.

In 2008, Greenspring Training was awarded Independent School Status for its Birmingham site where it provides alternative 14–16 provision with a Christian ethos.

The following year, it again moved, this time to a purpose built education training centre in Handsworth. This has improved the working and learning environment for both staff and young people. Greenspring Training's mission statement sets out its intention of 'planting a seed of education, training and hope ... that will enable present and future generations to enjoy

learning and achieving and to have something to be proud of.'

Who attends

The majority (87 per cent) of Greenspring Training's learners are from black, Asian (Bangladeshi) and other ethnic minority groups. Greenspring Training has an open door policy: anyone who enters it will be treated as an individual and have access to its services if appropriate. Learners are referred by a range of different organisations including Connexions, Prospects, Pupil Connect, youth offending teams, West Midlands Police, social services, and community organisations. Young people can also refer themselves.

The learners vary in their abilities, with some experiencing learning difficulties, physical disabilities, or behavioural problems: these may have contributed to varying degrees of school exclusion. Many learners also have English as a second language. Greenspring Training recognises the need for continued work with its local black and Asian business community to open up opportunities for young people who experience additional challenges such as these.

How it works

Greenspring Training is funded to provide Entry to Employment (E2E). It has also been commissioned by Pupil Connect in Birmingham to deliver Alternative Provision. Learners can work towards a range of accredited qualifications in a wide variety of

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subjects. English as a Second Language is also a part of Greenspring Training's programme, and this has proved particularly useful for its eastern European students. In addition to its accredited courses, Greenspring Training offers Entry to Learning Support for 16–18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training

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(NEET) through its Kick Start Life programme.

In 2008, Greenspring Training saw that many black and minority ethnic (BME) students needed additional support to help them progress from E2E to Apprenticeships. It secured funding for a short programme 'Supporting BME Students to Progress from E2E to Apprenticeships'.

Twenty seven young people – black African, black Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, and mixed white and black Caribbean – formed the first group of learners. Altogether, 52 young people have taken part.

The programme's main features are:

- intensive mentoring to help raise young people's aspirations about their future, provide them with a positive role model and identify and address external and internal barriers to progression
- the development of individual action plans to ensure that each young

person's specific support needs are addressed

- intensive advice and guidance to ensure that students have a clear understanding of progression routes into work-based learning, further education and employment and Apprenticeships
- interview preparation, including rigorous training on interview techniques, writing a CV, and producing application letters. Each student produces a DVD and a Powerpoint presentation about what they feel they are achieving
- a focus on personal presentation, which can mean buying appropriate clothing for students going to interviews.

To generate opportunities for the young people, Greenspring Training made contact with over 150 employers from black and Asian local businesses. The employers were invited to come and meet young people and discuss their requirements for students entering their business. Many now offer work experience to the young people and, for those they feel have completed this successfully, will consider offering an Apprenticeship place.

Learning and challenges

Greenspring Training believes there are three interlinked factors have contributed to the success of its work with BME learners and others from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The first is the need for good information advice and guidance provided through an induction process which makes sure that young people

are clear about what they've signed up for.

Greenspring Training's manager said:

"The learner's journey must be clear. If the learner comes in, and we say, 'This is your E2E programme', we need to signpost them all the way through this. Learners need to know what is happening from beginning to end and the process in between."

The induction process helps ensure that the learner is on the right programme, reveals any additional support needs they may have, and establishes mutual expectations.

The second success factor is an in-house mentoring programme which provides learners with one-to-one support throughout their learning. Mentors are local people, chosen in part to represent the ethnic mix of their communities. They are involved in the induction process and support learners with a range of personal, social and learning needs which might include, for instance, finding accommodation or buying shoes for an interview.

"We take full responsibility once they [the learners] are here. We let them know that we aren't going anywhere ... Every young person gets access to a mentor."

An important function of mentors is helping young people realise that bad experiences in their childhood do not have to dictate their future. The important thing is to raise their aspirations and build their confidence.

The third factor is a strong focus on building and maintaining positive relationships with local businesses, organisations and local people, so that young learners have positive role

Outcomes and achievements

- Sixty-one per cent of learners on the 'Supporting BME Students to progress from E2E to Apprenticeships' programme moved on to Apprenticeships, further learning or employment.
- This compares favourably with the progression rate from across Greenspring Training's other programmes which stood at 55 per cent in 2008/09. Greenspring Training is seeking to raise this figure to 65 per cent by the end of 2009/10.



models and are encouraged to raise their aspirations, as well as to generate work experience opportunities and help foster mutual respect. Examples include:

- inviting Black Role Models, a company based in the West Midlands, to come in and speak to young learners
- developing links with Aston University and Coventry University to give young learners the opportunity to visit a university, speak to students and 'get a feel for' what going to university might be like
- building relationships with local businesses to encourage them to offer placements to young learners
- inviting older local people in to meet and speak to the young people in order to share their experiences and to build mutual respect across the generations.

The organisation has a dedicated field worker who continually 'knocks on doors' to build relationships with local people and local employers.

Greenspring Training faces three ongoing challenges. The first of these, common to many projects, is funding and, in particular, an increasing level of competition for the funding that is available. The second is the need continually to tackle the negative stereotypes of young people that exist in the communities that Greenspring Training works in. The organisation does this by building relationships with local people, inviting them to visit the premises, meet young learners and take up the role of mentor. Engaging with employers is the third challenge: many organisations are only interested in young people who already have experience and are not willing to

provide that experience. Greenspring Training's approach is to engage with local businesses 'in the heart of the community' rather than the larger, more well known companies, and to negotiate flexible, shorter placements which suit both the employer and the learner, backed up with regular support visits as necessary.

"Community is important. ... There is so little hope, few jobs, and a lot of young people are depressed. It takes a community to pull this off and grow the child."

Greenspring Training feels that its impact on young people goes far beyond progression and achievement rates. Its manager summed this up:

"It's about young people who are strong enough to walk to an interview on their own, knowing that they are good enough. It's about having a respectful conversation with an adult they don't know. It's being able to make a phone call and ask for an application form. Sometimes it's just about having accommodation, and having access to a shower."

Greenspring Training's learners enjoy their experiences and the following learner statements illustrate this point.

"Tutors are great and the staff are very supportive."

"I didn't enjoy going to school, but I like it here."

"Staff and tutors encourage us at every opportunity to achieve our potential."

Closing messages

- Some subgroups of NEET young people would benefit from additional support to progress to other learning or work opportunities.
- Intensive one-to-one mentoring of young learners can help raise their aspirations, build their confidence and help them realise that negative experiences in the past do not have to dictate their future.
- It is important to provide good information, advice and guidance so that learners are clear about the options available to them and exactly what these will involve.
- Work with local communities and businesses to tackle negative stereotypes of young people, build mutual respect; and identify work experience opportunities for young people.
- Identify and address the many structural barriers that young people can face: these might include, amongst others, unsafe accommodation, limited access to washing facilities, and a lack of appropriate clothing for interviews or work.

Hartlepool College of Further Education

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Background

Hartlepool College is a medium sized further education college in a town centre location and has been undergoing a major redevelopment of its existing site.

The college serves an area of severe economic disadvantage. Regionally, a higher proportion of young people in the North East are not in education, employment or training (NEET) than in any other region in England. In January 2010, 8.3 per cent of 16-18 year olds, (almost 7,000 young people) were NEET, which compares unfavourably to the national average of 6.7 per cent. Locally, the disintegration of traditional industries has meant that Hartlepool has suffered more than its fair share of unemployment. The proportion of school leavers in Hartlepool who achieve five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics is well below the national average.

In response to this, Hartlepool College has developed a 'summer school' which is a short Entry to Employment programme running for six weeks over the summer. The summer school caters for young people who leave school with no immediate plans, and aims to help them progress to a learning programme, Apprenticeship or training course of their choice. The objective is to engage with the learners who might become NEET in order to keep them in learning.

Who attends

Some of the learners on the Entry to Employment programmes come from second or third generation workless families and face many economic challenges before they can start their further education. Secondary schools in the area have below average results. Furthermore, because there is little high-speed public transport provision that is not local, travelling to work or learning is difficult to be used.

Often learners will have caring responsibilities at home. In this position, the college has been providing additional transport, allowing flexible starting times so that young people can attend and continue their caring duties.

The College holds a case study with Connexions every year to ensure young people make progress and to monitor their performance. The College helps young people with their progress wherever it can.

How it works

The College works jointly with Connexions advisors to help young people who leave school with no clear next step in mind. The person who leaves school unsure of what they want to do can immediately start a learning programme – the summer school – which will help them make decisions in

time for the next academic year. In 2009, over 200 young people attended the summer school programmes.

The Entry to Employment programmes are held in a separate building from the main Hartlepool College site. Because it is a smaller building, it inspires a

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accommodates Learndirect and Connexions and learners have full access to IT resources.

After an initial interview and diagnostic tests to determine what programme level will best support their ability and needs, each young person attends a range of taster sessions. These include carpentry, bricklaying, engineering, plastering and decorating; over the course of six weeks, young people will rotate through a range of such courses to help them decide on a final destination, which might be an Apprenticeship or a college course.

Outcomes and achievements

- Learner feedback has been very positive. Most learners find the varied activities the most enjoyable parts of the summer programme. One of the learners who joined the programme in 2007 successfully achieved the E2E programme and with additional support went on to complete level 3 and became student of the year.
- Hartlepool College has delivered one of the top performing E2E programmes. The College has seen its progression rates rise steadily over the last five years from 52% in 2005 to 72% in 2009. This compares very favourably to a national average of just over 50%.
- Last year, 43% of the young people who attended the six week summer course progressed into Apprenticeships or full time programmes.

The college views these initial summer weeks as crucial in establishing a working ethos amongst the young learners. To help retain young people on the programme, it offers additional support. A case-load advisor monitors each young person's performance, and weekly meetings are held to discuss progress. Mentors are appointed and there are regular reviews with tutors and the Connexions advisors. Staff will also visit students at home to encourage them to attend the college and to establish if any additional support may be needed.

Last year additional funding was made available to sponsor a community service programme. Students on the programme worked over a six week period to refurbish the Hartlepool Indoor Market. This involved liaising with the stall-holders whose stalls would be refurbished and upgraded. Tutors helped the young people with planning, rewiring, painting and plastering the whole market hall. The young people worked evenings, weekends and bank holidays to complete the work in time for the 'grand opening' which was attended by local dignitaries and members of the football team. Of the 46 students who started the programme, 36 completed the work and earned a bonus of £100. The stall-holders were very complimentary about the quality, determination and honesty of the young people involved in the project.

Closing messages

- Begin the young people on practical tasks as soon as possible. Within one week of joining the programme learners are in the workshops doing practical activities.
- The separate centre within the College allows young people to feel welcome and they see it as safe ground. This makes an ideal transition into the College environment.
- Employ dedicated staff who have good operational experience and are able to empathise with the requirements of young learners.
- Set up a system which allows great communication between delivery partners, case-load advisors and young people.

Hands On Music, London

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Background

Hands On Music, established in 2002, is an Entry to Employment (E2E) programme run by training provider NTS Ltd. It works with 14 to 18 year olds who have become disengaged from learning.

NTS Ltd Director, Ben O'Connor, was inspired to set up Hands On Music after seeing a group of young people on the underground listening to music. Hands On Music aims to help young people develop practical skills, gain qualifications and grow in self-esteem and confidence, with music providing the 'hook' for achieving this.

The project began as a life skills programme run from a youth club in west London. Within two weeks, it had three members of staff and 25 young people on board. The project grew and grew, responding to demand from other parts of London, and adopting E2E programmes as these were introduced.

Over time, Hands On Music became successful enough to move to a permanent location: a 2,000 square foot workspace unit on an industrial estate in west London. Located there is a recording studio with £20,000 worth of equipment, a live performance room, an ICT suite with all the latest music technology software, post-editing suite and offices. It has been deliberately designed to have the 'feel' of a workplace rather than an educational establishment, so that young people experience a different kind of learning environment.

The number of staff, including volunteers, has also increased, and there is now one member of staff to every five learners. Hands On Music's director feels this is important as the more access the young people have to advice and guidance the more likely they are to achieve their goals and progress to something positive such as further education or employment.

Most of the participants are referred by their schools, which pay most of the costs. NTS Ltd only pays for the schools for each half term that the students attend, so that schools do not have to make a commitment to pay for future places without knowing whether students will continue with them. Another main source of funding is Sound Connections, an organisation that provides music training and learning opportunities for young people in Greater London.

Who attends

The project focuses on young people who are disengaged from learning. Some have learning difficulties; others have emotional and behavioural problems, a disability or health problem, or an unstable family background. The participants are:

- 14 to 16 year olds who are still at school but on part-time timetables and likely to become excluded. The programme allows young people can attend

a programme for up to four days a week, whilst remaining on the school register. If these students remain on the programme until they officially leave school, they can then sign on to the E2E programme with Hands On Music over the summer holidays.

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and are then encouraged to enrol for college or find employment in September. This reduces the chance of them 'slipping through the net'.

- 16 to 18 year olds who are disengaged from education, referred by agencies such as Connexions, social services

or youth offending teams, or who refer themselves

- A small number of over-18s if they have been out of the education system due to pregnancy or a prison sentence.

Other than being at risk of becoming NEET, the only eligibility criterion is that the young person must have an interest in music, even if this is simply listening to and appreciating it.

Outcomes and achievements

- Over the past five years, 64 per cent of Hands On Music's learners have progressed to employment, further education or another form of training.
- The 2008/09 progression rate, represents a 14 per cent improvement on the previous year. Of the 16 students on the summer course in 2009, 12 went on to college.
- There has been a sharp increase in literacy and numeracy rates, rising from 1.3 qualifications per learner in 2008 to 2.4 in 2009. 75 per cent of students have gained at least one qualification.
- Many of those who have passed through the programme have gone on to college to study a variety of subjects from music theory and performing arts to construction, hairdressing and child care. Among these, two are now considering going to university. Others have moved into employment at a local recording studio, in retail, in child care or at nearby Heathrow Airport. In the five years the programme has been running, five participants have won recording contracts.

How it works

Once a referral is received, learners are invited in for an informal interview, to discuss their past experiences and what they hope to achieve from the programme. Then a start date is offered. During the first couple of weeks they carry out numerous assessments, the results of which are used to devise an Individual Training Programme for the learner.

Young people's interest in music is explored and developed while they work towards formal qualifications. They can gain up to six qualifications (adult numeracy levels 1 and 2, adult literacy levels 1 and 2, and Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE) Introduction to Music Technology levels 1 and 2), whilst developing skills in a range of music-related disciplines including media management, stage management, singing, drama, song writing, DJ-ing, dance, MC-ing, and sound and lighting. NTS Ltd also has all the students take an online literacy test.

Hands On Music has a set curriculum which covers writing music and lyrics, aspects of performance, music history, the recording process (involving engineering, production, IT use and video), graphic design, stage, sound,

light management, media, management, publishing, copyright, employability and further education opportunities.

However, the programme has been designed to be flexible so that it suits the moods of the young people involved. Monday mornings are a good example of the need for flexibility as the learners come in with differing moods depending on what happened to them at the weekend. Some may have been having a great time partying while others may have been sleeping rough or spending the night in a police cell. Staff assess what issues there may be and adapt their sessions accordingly. They might then split the group up into smaller groups, according to mood, so that they can do different activities. Some might do some studio work such as singing or making a music video to lighten their moods. Others might have a discussion about an event in the news, which could range from the Brit nominations to MPs' expenses. These discussions help develop young people's communication and social skills: the more withdrawn learners are encouraged to express their opinions while those who are more vocal might be 'distracted' from dominating the discussion by being asked to take notes on the white board.

Literacy and numeracy are developed through work towards music qualifications, for example by having learners use computers to write song lyrics, developing their computer skills at the same time as improving vocabulary and grammar. Games like Scrabble and roulette play a similar role. Those who do well are rewarded with extra time in the recording studio or more time on the computers.

The young people have a one-to-one review every two weeks and those

leaving the programme are tracked for nine months to assess their progression. Former students are always welcome to return to get help with applying for a job or course or updating their CV. Staff from Hands On Music will accompany former students when registering for a college course.

Learning and challenges

The biggest challenge for Hands On Music is working with young people from such a wide variety of backgrounds, some of whom have been abused mentally, physically and/or sexually. It can be hard for staff not to become too emotionally involved. A challenge that the programme currently faces is engaging with potential employers in a difficult economic climate in order to generate opportunities for the young people on the programme.

Hands On Music believes that the success of the programme is enhanced by:

- allowing schools to 'try out' the programme before fully committing themselves to it (the project used funding from Sound Connection to facilitate this). This 'taster' opportunity is open to the 14 to 16 year olds who attend for up to four days a week
- designing the learning environment so that it does not resemble an educational establishment. Learners find that attending the programme is more like going to work than to school. They get a buzz from the activities they complete and enjoy the relaxed atmosphere.

The programme's popularity with schools continues to grow, with one

local school promising to enrol 18 pupils in early 2010.

Hands On Music has received some high profile interest and praise. This is what Miss Elizabeth Buchanan, the Assistant Private Secretary to HRH The Prince of Wales, had to say:

"Music is a wonderful way to bring people out of their shells and to give them the self-confidence that they need to overcome the hurdles that so many of them face. Through your programme you are giving these young adults the opportunity that they have been lacking. Young people need more opportunities that relate to them such as NTS Ltd, Hands on Music. In relation to this, NTS Ltd gives young people more chance to be listened to more, to express themselves in whatever way they feel, and to be heard out. The young people are not pre-judged by their looks, their skin, their dress or their sense of race."

Closing the messages

- Develop a learning environment which has the 'feel' of a workplace rather than a traditional educational establishment.
- Maintain a high staff-to-learner ratio. At Hands On Music there is one staff member to every five learners.
- Develop learners' skills through the creative use of games and other methods which learners will not necessarily associate with 'traditional learning' approaches.
- Be sensitive to young people's moods and their experiences outside the learning environment, and adopt a flexible approach.
- Build relationships and trust with potential funding organisations (in this case schools) by letting them try the programme before fully committing themselves.
- Ensure learners' smooth progression on completion of the course, whether this is into further learning, formal education or employment. Be there for former learners if they need help with a course of learning or applying for work.

Key Stage 4 School Engagement Programme, Southwark

Background

The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme is a national programme designed to offer a motivating and engaging route for 'disengaged' 14–16 year olds who find it hard to achieve progress within the curriculum offered by their schools. The programme offers a more work-focused learning environment and encourages students to complete Key Stage 4 and progress to further learning, training or

The Southwark School Engagement Programme, which is run by Southwark Council's Children's Services 14–19 Team, has been going for three years. Because 2009/10 is the final year of its initial funding, the 14–19 Team has piloted a new model that fits better with the new Foundation Learning programme. A key change from the previous year is that the team now pools the available funding to commission and quality assure a large number of training providers directly, whereas in the past

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Contact

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Team

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The young people referred tend to:

- have low levels of achievement, and poor attendance and behaviour records
- be keen to achieve in a work-based setting but are not interested in the academic option on offer
- want to focus on personal, social and functional skills in order to make further progress. Some are recent arrivals in the UK. Others may be experiencing personal problems that act as a barrier to learning
- have poor or weak motivation to study, but may see this as a fresh start.

Over 400 students, from 17 schools, were enrolled on the programme in 2008/09. Almost a third of the places were taken up by white young people, and just over 40 per cent of places went to young people from a black African or black Caribbean background. Nearly 70 per cent were male.

How it works

Learners come out of school for one or two days a week to undertake courses at small training providers or local FE colleges. The wide choice of courses includes performing arts, fashion and crafts, media, engineering, health and social care, construction, sport, hair and beauty, catering and business. Most are at Level 1 with some progression to Level 2, covering National Open College Network, Edexcel, Sports Leaders UK, Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education, Northern Council for Further Education and City and Guilds qualifications, arts

awards, and BTEC first diplomas, awards and certificates. Learners can also opt for small award-sized qualifications in different lines of learning with different providers each term.

The courses have been designed to tie in with Foundation Learning, the philosophy of which is that all students working at entry level and Level 1 should be entitled to a rounded package of functional skills (English, maths and ICT), personal and social development and vocational learning at the appropriate level, and thus develop skills which have greater value to employers. The School Engagement Programme provides the vocational part of the package together with some of the social and personal development. Schools provide the rest.

Outcomes and achievements

- Achievement rates are high. At least 80 per cent of young people who complete placements gain an accredited level 1 or 2 qualification. And 88 per cent of learners make a successful transition into further education, training or employment.
- There are also discernable benefits to learners' self-esteem and confidence. The 14–19 Team attributes this to the programme's ability to offer a flexible and personalised course of study, including a personalised curriculum, in a nurturing environment.

Partnership working

Relationship building and partnership working have been vital to the programme's success. The team offers opportunities for schools, providers and other agencies to meet and interact including:

- an annual 'marketplace' where providers can show schools and Connexions staff what they offer
- joint training for school staff and provider organisations
- involvement in forums and strategic groups such as the Foundation Learning Implementation Group.

The team has developed protocols for schools and providers on how they should work together and communicate, and supported them in doing so. On the whole this has worked well.

The team has also developed the 'Southwark Guarantee', an online tool which enables schools to access monitoring information on off-site learning. Training providers can set up their course content on the system, which also includes attendance registers, half-term reports, protocol documents, and performance monitoring of students, courses and institutions. The tool's 'Individual Learning Plan' function allows learners and teachers to set targets and goals, create an assessment plan, raise alerts and so on. Finally, the 'PlanMyRoute' function helps chart a progression path within a chosen line of learning towards a variety of career opportunities.

The success of partnership working in Southwark is illustrated by the fact that some schools invite training providers to attend parents' evenings and contribute to end-of-year reports.

Learning and challenges

Co-ordinating the programme in-house (rather than through external advisors, as happened in the first year) has had a number of benefits, including increased opportunities for training and support for staff from schools, training providers and Connexions. The team now has more control over what is on offer to schools, following its decision to commission off-site learning services directly. The team has chosen providers with whom they have existing good working relationships and providers whose courses best fit with Foundation Learning. Because the team carries out a single assessment on behalf of all schools – quality assurance, safeguarding and health and safety assessments – schools have been freed from this administrative burden.

The team feels that providers have worked well with some very vulnerable young people. FE college staff have experienced a steep learning curve with regard to classroom management and behaviour, given they are more used to working with older learners and have a 'looser' structure in place than schools. To help with this, Southwark delivered a behaviour management course for college staff, which was extremely well attended. The college and staff from the Pupil Referral Unit have put in place extra staff training, as well as support and mentoring sessions for staff.

Being off-site, and having trainers who are not school teachers, makes for different kinds of relationships. The courses available are ones that learners would not normally be able to do at school. The training providers are smaller so they can develop nurturing environments, allowing more practical,



small-group-based work on which the students thrive.

A key challenge for the programme has been easing the transition for young people entering and leaving the programme. This transition is not only physical, but also academic and emotional. The team feels the need to make this smoother by introducing a central induction process, in addition to the induction days carried out by individual providers, and by introducing 'taster' days so that students can try a course before they commit themselves to it. They have also made it easy to switch between courses if a learner decides he or she has made a mistake.

With money going directly to schools next year, Southwark does not expect to be able to support schools and providers in the ways it currently does. However, the team does feel that schools have appreciated how their less engaged students have benefited from more vocational styles of learning over the last few years. The team thinks this will spur schools on to provide more vocational education in-house which is likely to be sustainable in the long run.

Closing messages

- Help to build effective relationships between schools and providers: regular opportunities to meet and learn together; agreed protocols for joint working and communication; and a system for sharing information and monitoring students' performance.
- Offer plenty of choice in vocational learning, in environments which are different and more nurturing than traditional schools and offer a better student-teacher ratio.
- Address the workforce development needs of those providers who are inexperienced at working with more challenging learners.
- Offer 'taster' days and the flexibility for learners to switch courses if they decide they have made a mistake.
- Think about how to support students with their academic and personal needs as they enter and leave the programme.

Knowsley Community College

Background

Knowsley Community College, in Greater Merseyside, is one of the largest providers of further education in the country and offers a wide range of vocational opportunities to over 12,000 learners.

In 2007/08, the college achieved the Learning and Skills Council and Association of Colleges Award for 14–19 collaboration, thanks to its excellent track record of working with local schools and local organisations through the 14–19 Knowsley Collegiate. The award also recognised the sharing of strategies and actions that has led Knowsley Community College to become a 14-plus rather than a 16-plus institution.

This case study profiles the Performing Engineering Operations (PEO) programme, which is one of Knowsley's 'College First' courses. The college serves some of the most deprived areas in England and its College First courses are designed to introduce learners to the skills they'll need in their preferred profession and to prepare them for further study or employment.

Who attends

Most learners on the programme are male, which reflects the sector profile, and aged between 16 and 19. In 2008/09, 18 young people enrolled on the programme, and 15 enrolled the following year.

PEO is aimed at young people aged 16-plus who have not achieved well at school and have additional

challenges to overcome, such as low self-confidence, anger management issues or poor social skills. The college attracts learners to the PEO through a variety of routes including open days and open evenings, mailshots to local households, and the college prospectus and website. It also holds 'Moving On' events with all its learners aged 14 to 16 to explore their expectations about their future, ensure that these are realistic, and help them on to further learning opportunities, such as PEO, or employment. Some learners also join from the college's Entry to Employment (E2E) programme.

How it works

The PEO programme is accredited by EMTA Awards Limited and is offered at Level 1. It is a year-long course, requiring 16 hours attendance a week at the Kirkby site, where much of the college's vocational learning takes place. The course combines vocational learning (12 hours a week) with skills development in English and maths. Learners are introduced to a number of different areas of engineering – including electro-technology, mechanical, and fabrication and welding – giving them a firm base from which they can progress to the Level 2 PEO, other further education programmes or employment.

Bi-weekly tutorials help to maintain learners' motivation and build their life skills. These group-based tutorials include team building exercises and pastoral support. The young people are also given one-to-one support and pastoral care where this is needed. College First programmes include

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more tutorial support than most other college courses.

Knowsley College recognises how important it is that PEO learners enjoy their experiences of learning and places a strong emphasis on this by including 'enrichment' activities as part of the course. These include team sports, outward bound activities, driving theory test practice and site

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safety training (for working in the construction industry).

At the beginning of the PEO, learners undergo an induction process to help them settle in and assess their vocational aptitude. The college uses practical activities, such as making a key ring or metal dice, as part of the induction and also runs group-based exercises to look at how participants interact with other learners.

Learners are supported to make decisions at the end of the programme through the personal tutorial programme – which invites guest speakers from the college's student services or Connexions to talk about

careers and progression routes. Tasters are organised across several areas of engineering – including mechanical, fabrication and electrical engineering – in the final term of the programme to inform learners about appropriate pathways.

This type of learner thrives more on working with as few members of staff as possible so it is important that a learner's vocational tutor is also their personal tutor. The college also has student advisors who work solely with its College First learners, providing additional support to individual learners where it is deemed necessary by the personal tutor. Student advisors work across the college on a number of other vocational programmes and will usually work on a one-to-one basis with learners on pastoral or behavioural issues, and in conjunction with the personal tutor.

The visits to outward bound centres are popular, particularly one called 'Go Ape' where learners have an opportunity to climb ropes and ride on tyres connected across trees, a great way of building confidence, communication and team-working skills.

Monitoring and assessing performance

During their induction, learners complete literacy and numeracy assessments; these are set in a vocational context so that they are more relevant to learners' needs and less threatening. They assess the level at which learners are working, which is usually entry level or Level 1. Vocational aptitude tests are also completed which identify skill gaps that are addressed for individual learners through the tutorials or the programme as a whole.

The college uses its electronic system, Learners Electronic Achievement Profile (LEAP), to track learners' progression over the duration of the programme. Tutors normally complete three LEAP reviews a year with each student, one-to-one, and the system records 'distance travelled' scores calculated on a learner's prior qualifications. Learners are also scored between 1 and 7 (1= excellent; 7 = unacceptable) for achievement, motivation, punctuality, attendance, attitude, and behaviour. These are all discussed with learners and measures taken to support learners if their scores are causing concern. All staff associated with a student can access the system to monitor a student's performance and communicate any issues. Details of a learner's diagnostic results and learning styles are kept on LEAP for the personal tutor and other relevant staff to refer to.

The college collects feedback from learners at the mid-way point and end of the programme and has found that they particularly enjoy the practical aspects of the programme and the variety of the tasks that they cover whether it is filing, cutting out shapes of metal, measuring within given tolerances, or trying other aspects of engineering including arc welding or electrical work. Learners also enjoy making tools, drill drifts or pipe wrenches, that they can use later.

Learning and challenges

The college feels that there are four elements of the programme which are critical to its success in closing the gap. The first of these is clear information and guidance for potential learners and their parents or carers, so that they

Outcomes and achievements

- Amongst the 2008/09 learners, 90 per cent completed the course, and 94 per cent of these achieved a qualification, an attainment figure of 85 per cent. This is considerably higher than would be expected on a Level 1 PEO programme, where the benchmark is 60 per cent.
- The majority of 2008/09 learners (90 per cent) progressed to the Level 2 PEO programme, which the college attributes to the combination of a practical accredited course, skilled, empathetic tutors who understand this kind of learner and the inclusion of enrichment activities.
- The college also reports very noticeable improvements in learners' motivation, attitude, punctuality, attendance and behaviour.

understand what the course offers, and whether it is right for them in terms of their expectations and interests.

The second is having patient, empathetic tutors who understand the kind of learners they are working with and the additional support that they might need. The bi-weekly tutorials are an essential part of helping learners maintain their motivation, as well as to develop their 'softer' skills such as communication and social interaction. This type of learner thrives on working with as few members of staff as possible so it is important that the vocational tutor is also the personal tutor.

The third is establishing and maintaining a good two-way dialogue with the parents and carers of those on the programme in order to discuss any issues or difficulties that have arisen and to give positive feedback on the achievements of learners and to congratulate them. The programme has found that this is best done through a mix of phone calls to the family home and through postcards.

Fourth, the college's electronic LEAP system enables tutors to monitor learners' achievements continuously in relation to some of the 'softer' skills essential to learners' progression within further learning or work, such as punctuality, attendance, motivation and attitude. Tutors can then offer tailored support to any learner who needs it.

This is what young learners said about the programme:

"I have enjoyed the College First programme because the tutors are very helpful and I have really liked working on different jobs including sheet metals and working with different tools."

"I like creating things with metals and have made many new things. The programme has really been the best experience that I have had in school or college and hope to go further."

The Director (14–19) of Engineering/Motor Vehicle at Knowsley Community College has this to say:

"The College First programme has been tremendously successful in raising achievement and narrowing the gap for many economically disadvantaged young people by providing them with a vocational experience which builds their self-esteem and develops a range of skills. This cannot be achieved without the hard work, dedication and expertise of a superb team of tutors and support staff that understand this type of learner and that we have at the college. It is so encouraging to see how many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can find something that they enjoy and can change their lives around with such positive results. Long may it continue."

Closing messages

- Give potential learners and their parents/carers clear information and guidance to ensure that the course meets their expectations and interests. Back this up with ongoing dialogue over the course of the programme to celebrate achievements and address any issues or difficulties that arise.
- Offer one-to-one tutorial support that goes beyond the standard amount on offer to other students. Tutors should have an understanding and experience of working with learners who experience additional challenges such as low self-confidence, anger management issues or poor social skills, and offer pastoral support on a group and one-to-one basis.
- Minimise the number of staff with whom learners have to interact. At Knowsley College, each learner's vocational tutor is also their personal tutor.
- Include fun, non-course-related activities, to motivate learners, develop their life skills, and help them enjoy their college experience.
- Have a robust process for monitoring and reporting on learners' achievements (including punctuality, motivation and attitude) so that any issues of concern can be identified quickly.

Multi-agency brokerage for vulnerable young people, East of England LSC

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Background

Since November 2009, the former Learning and Skills Council East of England has funded a programme of multi-agency brokerage for vulnerable young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The programme is designed to address the internal and external barriers that different groups of vulnerable young people experience. It builds on the successes of a brokerage programme for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD) in the region which has led to an increased uptake of mainstream education by this group of learners. When this case study was written in April 2010, the project had completed its planning and set-up phase and begun the delivery phase. It has learned some valuable lessons so far, and developed some tools that will be of interest to others working in this field.

Who attends

The programme concentrates its support on five subgroups of NEET young people: young offenders; young parents; looked-after children; young people with mental health problems; and those with special educational needs or LLDD who are not covered by the existing LLDD brokerage programme.

How it works

The brokerage programme brings together four private, voluntary and public sector providers: NACRO, City College Norwich, Shaw Trust and Pitman Training with Cementaprise. They were chosen through an open and competitive tendering process. Independent expert advisors facilitate the programme, working closely with East of England's regional project leads and contract managers.

The providers are working in five localities across the East of England: Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire, Ipswich in Suffolk, Dacorum in Hertfordshire, Maldon District in Essex and Norwich in Norfolk. The five localities and the subgroups were chosen by area partnership teams working with their stakeholders. The teams each identified different groups which they believed were vulnerable to poor outcomes, and agreed a particular locality where they saw possibilities for the growth of local partnerships, without which brokerage schemes are unlikely to be successful or sustainable.

In most cases, providers have not collaborated before. They are expected to work together to plan and implement the programme as well as share their expertise and learning.

Having a project management structure in place is an important feature: it helps to identify examples of good practice as these emerge and to develop new ways of partnership working that can be replicated in the future.

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The programme aims to identify and support young people with the greatest needs and partners have designed a range of sensitive and robust assessment tools to achieve this aim. The four providers are working with experts and others, including young people themselves, to take this forward. The programme has developed a tool to measure an individual's progress on a day-to-day basis and will use this information to understand young people's needs from a local and regional perspective.

Young people on the programme receive accredited coaching and one-to-one mentoring support and impartial information, advice and guidance. A personalised package of support is developed for them and they develop action plans to help them identify their needs and plan their next steps. All are offered work experience placements.

The providers will help tackle external barriers – often beyond the young

person's control – which prevent them from pursuing education or training. These include lack of transport, housing problems, social care issues and financial concerns as well as lack of connectivity between provider organisations. At the same time, through coaching or mentoring, it will address what could be considered as internal barriers such as lack of trust, low self-esteem or disappointment with past learning experiences in mainstream education.

Using external advisors in the programme's early stages brings a number of benefits. The advisors developed a 'project initiation document' clearly stating the programme's objectives, the responsibilities of all involved in meeting those objectives, how risks should be measured and managed and the required dates for monitoring, networking and reporting. This has helped ensure that all providers understand what is expected of them and are accountable for their actions.

A series of network events allows the providers to meet and develop joint working practices. At the first of these, the providers together mapped out programme activities and a time line. These regular events will help to ensure that the providers continue to work well together and share what they learn.

The expert advisors have also been helpful in linking the 'strategic vision' of the programme and its practical implementation, by spending time with operational staff to help them understand the wider benefits of the programme. The advisors have also demonstrated to the partners how project management techniques can be used to outline how they will take the programme forward, and share

Closing messages

- Tackle the external barriers that prevent young people accessing education, training and employment, and which are often beyond their direct control, such as transport issues and housing problems.
- Use mentoring to address the internal barriers that young people experience such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence and disappointment with past learning experiences.
- When working in partnership ensure strong project management arrangements are in place, including clearly specified objectives, responsibilities, and monitoring and reporting requirements.
- Create regular opportunities for partners to meet and share learning, which might include group-based tasks.
- Recognise the gap that can exist between a strategic vision agreed by senior managers within organisations and the realities of delivery on the ground. Find ways to bridge such a gap where it exists.

the work most effectively. This has also helped to create a baseline for evaluating the programme.

The involvement of advisors will taper off over time. The programme is clear that the relationship between the external advisors and the providers should mirror the one that providers have with the young people: they engage, support and listen but it is up

Outcomes and achievements

- The programme is in its early stages but aims to ensure that at least 75 per cent of the young people it works with will become engaged in employment, education or training on leaving.
- As of 19 April 2010, there are 51 young people on the programme, which will increase to 142 by the end of the year.
- The programme has developed and is using its self-assessment tools for good practice.

to the individual to do the work and develop. The intention is that learning from expert advisors will help to define a model of good practice for project management, complemented by evidence, so that future projects can plan and manage themselves effectively.

Learning and challenges

The programme is showing that successful brokerage involves building a one-to-one relationship with an individual, assessing their specific needs, and putting together a package of different services, including learning and work experience, to meet those needs. The broker must be flexible and work with the young person in a range of different settings to support their learning and employment journey.

The programme is also assisting the different organisations involved in supporting young people to work together more closely and for this to be sustained. It has become clear that Connexions services are particularly important partners.

On Track, North Warwickshire & Hinckley College

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Background

In 2007, the former Coventry & Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council approached North Warwickshire & Hinckley College with the idea of forming a consortium aimed at tackling the high number of young people in the local area who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The college is now the lead partner of the consortium, which brings together a mix of private, college and third sector organisations. This includes Rathbone, Pertemps and Nuneaton Training Centre, Connexions, C&W Learning and the local youth offending team. Together, they are responsible for various personal and social development activities and vocational workshops.

Having secured one-year funding from the European Social Fund, the Consortium launched its first 'On Track' programme. Its target was assisting 100 NEET young people to progress to education, training or employment. The target was easily met and, following this initial success, the consortium bid for and secured financial support to continue the programme for another two years until December 2010 with a new target of 350 young people. Now (April 2010), more than half-way through the programme, On Track is confident that it will meet its new and more ambitious target. A number of new partners have joined the consortium in order to help do so.

Who attends

On Track operates within the catchment area of the college, which encompasses Nuneaton, Bedworth and North Warwickshire. It is an ex-coal mining area that has been one of those hardest hit by the current recession and it has one of the highest unemployment rates in the region. Young people on the On Track programme often come from low income families; many of the young men are known to local police and there are persistently high levels of teenage pregnancies amongst young women. About two-thirds of the NEET young people in the area are male and On Track's outreach work takes this into account by concentrating on young men. That said, some of On Track's activities, such as business administration and hairdressing, are particularly popular amongst young women.

On Track gets referrals from Connexions, one of the consortium's main partners, although a significant number of young learners are attracted to it through the outreach work of On Track staff.

On Track's Development Manager says:

"We can't sit and wait for a referral. We need to be as proactive as possible."

How it works

All partners offer personal and social development activities and vocational workshops. Each carries out an initial diagnostic assessment in preparation

for producing individual learning plans. Most learners are at Entry Level 2 or 3 when they enrol onto the programme and have achieved few qualifications at school. Average group sizes are between eight and ten and programmes run for ten weeks.

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Outcomes and achievements

- With a target of engaging with 350 young people between August 2008 and December 2010, On Track has so far engaged 243 individuals.
- Of 188 leavers, 117 have gone on to further education or employment. This considerably exceeds the target rate.
- The achievements of On Track also demonstrate the development of participants' 'softer' skills. They have increased their confidence and motivation and improved their attitude. This is particularly relevant, considering that many learners entering On Track have barriers to learning such as poor previous experiences and particular social needs.
- The outcomes of On Track are often visible outside the programme. For example, a group of learners who had been NEET won the Leicestershire's Got Enterprising Business Talent Final sponsored by Leicester University. Using their newly learnt carpentry skills, they competed against 11 other local colleges to win with their business idea called Companion Coffins, manufacturing pet coffins.
- On Track continues to receive very positive feedback from its users, with 93 per cent of learners saying they would recommend the programme to others.

All learners have a key worker to mentor and support them throughout the programme they choose. College key workers support young people to deal with personal issues to help them to progress; they also run learning activities in their own vocational or subject specialisms.

On Track's teen parents programme, Teens and Tots, has proved particularly popular. It requires young people to attend the college for two days a week. They participate in sessions covering sexual health, healthy eating, maths and English, 'pamper' sessions, CV writing and job searching.

In order to reach young people, On Track staff produce fliers and visit local places where young people tend to meet, such as shopping centres. To enhance this work, On Track is currently developing a DVD where young people from the programme talk about the impact that it has had on their lives.

Initially, young people are invited to a Chill & Chat session, a very informal meeting where they can look at the possibility of re-entering education or training, and are then invited to take part in the programme.

On Track has a number of features designed to support economically disadvantaged young people, including:

- local organisations coming in to talk to young people about practical issues relating to their transition to employment, education or training. Examples include the Citizens Advice Bureau which runs a session on finance and budgeting, and Unionlearn which talks about rights and responsibilities in the workplace
- the use of gift vouchers over the course of the programme to

recognise achievement. These can allow young people to cover costs that they otherwise could not afford such as clothes for job interviews

- on-site child-care available for young parents who take part in the programme. This encourages young mothers to attend the college regularly and enables them to focus on classes
- a trip at the end of the programme for participants, many of whom can not afford regular holidays. End-of-programme trips have included visits to a local farm and an amusement park.

An additional incentive for young people to complete the programme is the On Track Learner of the Year Award, given each year to an individual who has done particularly well. Last year, the Award was won by a young mother who had managed to complete the programme in ten weeks and then got a job as a teaching assistant.

While many young women at On Track find support through Teens and Tots, young men tend to want help with finding work in the construction industry. On Track's development manager is aware that the current economic situation is not ideal for the construction sector, but she believes that, by building on participants' initial interests, On Track will still bring about positive results.

"What we try really hard to do is to listen to what young people want, and most of them want the skills that will get them a job. Sitting in the classroom makes these boys bored and frustrated, so let them at least engage in something they enjoy."

On Track is trying to match young men's expectations and potential to the local economy.

"We sit in the middle of the logistics industry in the area, but we don't have many people coming and saying that they want to work in logistics: they don't know what it is."

On Track is providing young people with information about opportunities in the sector and advice on how to enter it. It is working with Skills for Logistics and Unionlearn to offer learners opportunities to visit local companies where they can see what skills are required and how logistics professions differ from work in the construction sector.

Although On Track is not qualification-driven, the programme has offered the opportunity to gain short qualifications in first aid and adult literacy and numeracy.

Learning and challenges

The major challenge that staff at On Track face is recruiting young people. The programme's development manager has learned that helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to get back into education, employment or training takes time and requires perseverance:

"Once we have people interested, we tend to keep them, so the challenge is to get them interested in the first place."

On Track takes a very proactive approach to recruitment rather than solely relying on referrals. Its approach combines outreach workers going to places where young people are, and at the same time encouraging young

people to 'spread the word' to their friends. Young people are offered gift vouchers as an incentive to bring their friends to On Track.

"Most people come to us through word of mouth. We keep on saying to the young people we work with, 'Do you know anybody? Why don't you bring them along?'"

Effective communication and relationship building between partners from different sectors and with different areas of expertise has been critical to the consortium's success. The college, as lead partner, has managed this through:

- facilitating face-to-face meetings every six weeks with providers and stakeholders to share practice and discuss progress
- fostering open and honest dialogue across the consortium
- appreciating providers' existing ways of working and encouraging good practice sharing
- setting monthly targets and regularly reviewing individual providers' performance against these
- developing collective responsibility for meeting monthly programme-wide targets, as well as individual ones.

On Track's development manager notes:

"It is not about working in silos and competing; it's about sharing the resources and good practice, and keeping the momentum going. Our partners tell us this way of working is unusual."

Setting monthly targets, combined with a robust approach to performance management, has resulted in members of the consortium being very target-

Closing the messages

- Actively recruit programme participants through outreach work.
- Provide learners with incentives to recognise their achievements as well as to encourage their further success.
- Provide on-site childcare to enable young parents to participate in learning opportunities.
- Enhance the success of strategic partnership working through regular meetings, open and honest dialogue, and an appreciation of providers' existing ways of working.
- Develop a robust performance management system to keep partners motivated and ensure accountability for outcomes.

driven and motivated, which has worked to everyone's benefit. However, they never lose sight of the fact that On Track is about helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the whole consortium needs to be passionate about the prospect of improving the life circumstances of these individuals:

"We're about raising the profile of young people. If the school system has failed them for whatever reason, we give them another chance."

South Devon College

Background

South Devon College, in the heart of Torbay, has experienced a dramatic transformation over the last seven years, progressing from an overall 'Unsatisfactory' rating by Ofsted in 2002, to being designated 'Outstanding' in November 2008. It was awarded

status by Ofsted in 2009, for its improvement in the last year. It was also nominated for the Beacon Award in 2009 for its collaboration with the local community in the same year.

Torbay is a coastal town in the south west of England. It is a diverse area characterised by high levels of social and economic disadvantage. There are high levels of deprivation, with high rates of unemployment, teenage pregnancy, and homelessness. The area has a high proportion of people from black and ethnic minority communities, which reflects the ethnic mix of the area. The area has a high proportion of people from black and ethnic minority communities, which reflects the ethnic mix of the area. The area has a high proportion of people from black and ethnic minority communities, which reflects the ethnic mix of the area.

percentage of unauthorised absence in Torbay schools is considerably higher than the national average.

Yet, the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is much lower than would be expected. It currently stands at 3.6 per cent, which is considerably lower than the South West average of 5.6 per cent and the England average of 6.4 per cent. The college attributes this in large part to its commitment to working in partnership with local organisations and the local community to support the most challenged young people back into learning or into employment.

This case study focuses on the college's Entry to Employment (E2E) provision and the extra steps it has taken to support young parents through its Teen Parent Programme.

Who attends

Most learners are aged 16 to 18. They often have highly complex social and emotional needs, and come from households characterised by high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The challenges they face can include alcohol and drug dependency, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, and a history of living in the care system. A small proportion of learners are from black and ethnic minority communities, which reflects the ethnic mix of the area.

Learners are referred to the E2E programme by a range of organisations such as Connexions, the youth offending team and the college itself,

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or by friends. They can also self-refer. The college has never needed actively to market the course, as word of mouth has been enough to attract applicants.

How it works

The E2E programme, which the college runs in partnership with Teignmouth Community Association and The Windmill Association, is a full time course, starting with 16 hours per week and rising to 30 hours per week. The partnership arrangement allows the college to run its programme in a range of community venues in Torquay, Newton Abbot and Teignmouth, close to where young people live. The Windmill Association supports the most challenging young people as it has more experience in doing so than the other two partners.

On average, learners remain on the programme for 22 weeks, and work on three main areas: personal and social development; vocational/employability development; and basic/functional skills. The aim is for young learners to develop their motivation and confidence, personal effectiveness and basic skills and to acquire vocational knowledge.

The programme is entirely learner-focused and the initial assessment is crucial in identifying their individual learning and support needs. The assessment can take up to six weeks, and determines numeracy and literacy levels, learning styles and the targets learners want to reach, as well as background information such as previous learning experiences, home

Outcomes and achievements

- The college has consistently exceeded its target number of learners, and has almost doubled the number of young people it supports, from 249 in 2007/08 to 457 in 2009/10.
- Between 60 per cent and 65 per cent of E2E learners progress into full time education, training or employment and remain there for nine months.
- The college sees strong evidence that learners grow in confidence and feel more able to take charge of their lives.
- With the college's support, many learners have moved from unsettled situations into independent living, others have tackled issues – for instance, of debt or of bullying – that previously blighted their lives.
- The college has also helped young people to get the help and advice they needed to address sexual health and dependency issues, while those with criminal backgrounds have often found E2E the right place to gain a sense of belonging and a way to put this part of their lives behind them.

life, interests, health and aspirations. Learners may need to work on their more complex emotional and social needs before undertaking any vocational learning.

Although E2E is not qualification-driven, the college recognises that acquiring qualifications can be a

powerful motivator, and therefore provides learners with a range of appropriate opportunities. In line with the college's commitment to working in and with the local community, a key feature of its E2E provision is community placements, where the young people volunteer to work on community-based projects. Examples include redesigning Paignton lighthouse so it can be turned into an alcohol-free club for young people, and tidying up a community park in Newton Abbot to make it more attractive for users.

Other important elements of the college's E2E programme include:

- creating the right environment for learning. Learners enjoy the programme because it is different from the traditional school classroom: they are treated differently by staff and attend the programme in local community venues which they are encouraged to look after
- access to specialist professionals. The college employs a nurse, a relationship and sexual health worker, a behavioural management worker, and youth workers to support its most challenged learners
- sensitivity and responsiveness to learners' needs. The college felt that some learners were not fully engaging with the programme because they were hungry, so it created a Breakfast Club, where learners could have a healthy meal
- using a range of other organisations, such as Supported Housing and the youth offending team, to provide support to learners
- providing minibuss transport for learners so they can get to the E2E venues safely and with no financial outlay, and delivering outreach

provision to those living in the most rural areas who are reluctant to travel beyond their immediate vicinity

- an excellent relationship with Connexions. This ensures effective information sharing to develop a good understanding of the needs of young people in the area; improved targeting and recruitment of the most challenged young people; and better support to young learners through joint learner reviews
- celebrating learners' achievements. This is done in a number of different ways including 'progression lunches', where learners who have done well on the programme are invited to have lunch with the principal and vice principal. Learners are also invited to college open evenings to share their experiences with potential students and are very much regarded as ambassadors for the college.

In addition to its E2E programme, the college has established a Teen Parent course in response to the very high rates of teenage conception in the area. The programme is delivered in Newton Abbot and Torquay. Young people attend for 12 hours a week, for 10 weeks, and the college provides a crèche at each venue, which not only allows parents to attend, but also gets them used to the idea of childcare and how they might use it if they move on to other learning or employment. The young people are taught parenting skills and work towards ASDAN Personal and Social Development Level 1, which contains modules in managing money, parenting awareness, healthy eating and preparation for work. They also cook and eat together, building their social skills, while visits to children's centres and leisure facilities allow them to mix with parents of other ages.

Learning and challenges

Through its experiences of delivering E2E and pre-E2E programmes, the college has learned that a number of factors are critical to the success of its work with the most socially and economically-deprived young people.

The first is strategic commitment to supporting these learners, which motivates staff to find creative solutions to any challenges that crop up and act quickly and decisively. Examples include: opening an additional centre in Newton Abbot at very short notice; purchasing a minibus so that transport is not a barrier for learners; and hiring a village church for the Teen Parent Programme when no other existing venues were available.

Second is the need for a community focus. The college delivers its E2E programme in community venues which feel comfortable and open to learners and, for some, less intimidating than the college's large main campus. E2E learners are strongly encouraged to volunteer on community placements which helps develop their sense of responsibility to their local community. The use of community venues and community placements in turn helps raise local people's awareness of the programme, which plays a vital role in 'spreading the word' and recruiting young people to the programme.

Third is fully to understand learners' needs (including social, emotional, financial and vocational) and what they want from the programme, and then finding ways to address these. The college places a strong emphasis on getting feedback from learners. It has a corporate 'learner involvement strategy', and is constantly seeking ways

to improve its E2E programme based on the views and experiences of its learners.

Like other providers, one of the challenges that the college faces is how it will meet the wide-ranging needs of its most disadvantaged learners with the introduction of Foundation Learning, a more 'qualifications driven' approach than E2E. Another challenge is the need to constantly seek financial support to deliver the Teen Parent Programme, as there is a significant and ongoing need for such a course.

A trainer on the programme says:

"Pre-16 education has not worked for many of E2E learners so we have to approach our learners in a more humanistic way. I believe we do this by focusing on and raising young people's self-esteem, which is key to our success. Doing this provides them with a sense of direction, allowing them to progress and achieve further qualifications or employment."

Young people agree:

"E2E has helped me think about my future more and helped me make my mind up about what college I want to go to. It has helped me change my life as I was doing nothing at that time, so I am happy that I have something to get out of bed for in the morning."

Closing the gap messages

- Some learners will need to work on complex social and emotional needs before undertaking any kind of vocational learning.
- Creating the right environment for learning is essential. This includes the venues used; the staff's approach and attitudes; and being sensitive to learners' own issues.
- Success requires a strategic commitment to targeting the most disadvantaged learners, and quick decision-making when issues and challenges arise.
- Collaborative working with other agencies is essential. It leads to a better understanding of the learners, more effective recruitment, and more tailored support to meet the young person's complex needs.
- A focus on the local community – for example, using community venues, and providing opportunities for young people to volunteer on community projects – can greatly aid learner engagement and retention, as well as promoting community cohesion.

Traveller Project, Bulwell, Nottinghamshire

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Background

The Traveller Project, established in October 2007, works with Traveller young men and women not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Nottingham and is delivered by Nottingham City Council's training provider Learning Works. In 2006, the Commission for Racial Equality described Gypsies and Travellers in its Common Ground report as 'one of the most marginalised minorities in society as reflected by poor health and access to services'.

Learning Works collaborates closely with a Travellers Partnership, consisting of Bulwell Vision of Health, Framework Travelling Together, Connexions, Race Equality Council, and others, to identify young people and deliver learning opportunities aimed at improving their skills and employability. Learning Works decided that a discrete education programme for the young Travellers would be needed as their commitments at home, such as cleaning and looking after siblings, can make it hard for them to sustain participation in mainstream Entry to Employment provision. This idea was very well received by potential learners who were approached by the Connexions Personal Adviser for Gypsy, Traveller and Romany Young People during regular site visits. Funding from the former Learning and Skills Council's Equality and Diversity Team helped to turn the idea into a reality.

Initially, the project's training was run from the nearby Bulwell Healthy Living Centre as it was familiar to and

trusted by the Traveller community. This was important as parents worried about racist attitudes and negative influences on their children in more mainstream environments. Young women in particular are protected by their families and are not generally allowed off the site unaccompanied. The Healthy Living Centre acted as a stepping stone in building up the young women's confidence to go outside the site. As the young women became more confident, the training incorporated a day of training at the Learning Works' own premises in the centre of Nottingham, reflecting the willingness of the learners attending Learning Works' facility, and of their parents to permit it, reflects the trust placed in the Traveller community by the training provider.

Who attends

The programme concentrates on Traveller young men and women who are NEET and aged between 16 and 19. Currently the programme attracts Travellers from the Irish community, but there are plans to work with learners from other emerging communities. For cultural reasons males and females attend separately from females.

At the beginning of the project, eight young women signed up and four have remained on the programme, being joined by two young Traveller women. Ten young men registered their interest at the start of the programme, but only four attended the initial construction course due to

in its starting. Word of mouth is an important means of promotion for the programme.

A number of the young people have not been in mainstream school for many years; some of the young men have attended school until Year 9 but many of the young women have not done so since age 11. This fits with family and community expectations

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How it works

The programme offers different activities for male and female learners. For young females, activities have varied according to the funding available but core activities aimed

at building literacy skills are always provided. Other activities have included a mentoring programme designed to help the young women work with younger siblings, a traditional Traveller cookery course, basic food hygiene, first aid training and sessions on improving personal health. Courses have also been run in hair, beauty and fashion design, which have included visits to and taster days at the local college. Job seeking skills, preparing for interviews and job readiness are taught on a weekly basis. Most learning is delivered at entry or pre-entry level, but one current learner hopes to obtain a Level 1 in English.

Developing literacy skills is also a core activity in the provision for male learners. But the focus of the vocational aspect of the programme has been a course in construction. The Construction Groundworks course includes two units from the NVQ1 in Construction Skills and helps learners work towards gaining a CSCS Card (a requirement for working in the construction industry). Laptops were issued to learners who took part in a Dyslexia Association qualification called 'Touch type, Read and Spell'.

because activities have a potentially short life span, they are staffed by temporary tutors and are held in hired classrooms. This is never the most cost effective way of doing things.

Learning Works feels that the project has been successful thanks to the commitment of an exceptional Personal Advisor from Connexions working as part of the team. Not only does the Traveller community trust her but she was also very keen to offer training to enhance the employability of the young Travellers. Having a very committed and active Traveller Partnership team was also important in ensuring the project was a success.

Finally, obtaining the trust of the parents and the support of the elders in the Traveller community were fundamental to a good working relationship between the Partnership and the community.

Learning Works feels that the project has been a success, particularly for the young female Travellers, as there are no other targeted learning opportunities open to them outside the home.

Learning Works has also been impressed by the young women's regular attendance, punctuality and ability to work to a timetable despite coming from a community where daily life tends to be unstructured.

Feedback from the learners has been positive too. Evaluations carried out in 2008 showed that all of the learners said their confidence had grown and all said they would be interested in finding out more about follow-up courses. The young women were particularly pleased with the location of the training centre, as they felt safe and secure there. Learners really appreciated the mentoring programme and enjoyed

Outcomes and achievements

- Numeracy and literacy have improved among the young Traveller women. At the beginning of the programme some were unable to read or write whereas now they are discussing concepts like sentence structure.
- Young Traveller women have gained self-confidence, and over time have become comfortable in travelling to learning centres by bus rather than in taxis.
- The young women have achieved certificates in first aid, beauty and needlecraft, and entry level qualifications in Open College Network courses: 'Providing information in written form' and 'Exploring literacy skills'.
- Among the young men who took part in the project, some have obtained their CSCS training card, which is essential for work in the construction industry, and others have achieved units of the NVQ Level 1 General Construction Operations. More recently, a short course for the young men has resulted in four learners gaining the Street Works card.

Learning and challenges

A key challenge for the programme has been that the funding tends to be sporadic which has meant that activities have had to change accordingly, which can make the programme feel disjointed. Learning Works feels that having an umbrella brand for the activities as a whole will make it more joined up, and new activities can simply be added in as funding becomes available. The ad hoc nature of the funding also means that,

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the taster days at college. This has led some of them to aspire to progress to college. The following quotations reflect learners' views on this project:

“I think this course is very good because I can't really read and write so I have to get other people to fill in letters and stuff like that but while I come to this course I can learn these skills and its ...very good because it's so near to home.”

“ We learn about skin cancer and healthy eating and also reading and writing which is very helpful and I'm not allowed to go to college so this is the only help I can get. It's so near to home so my parents approve!”

“I've never been to college before and it was exciting. We learned hair and beauty facials and nails.”

In the future, the project hopes to build on its successes so far and focus more on helping the young Travellers to progress further.

Closing the gap messages

- Young Travellers' lifestyles and cultural norms can make it hard to sustain participation in more mainstream activities.
- Collaborate with local organisations to engage with the Traveller community, recruit young learners, and deliver activities sensitively tailored to their cultural norms.
- Site yourself in a location that feels safe for young learners and that is known to the local Traveller community. This can provide a stepping stone for developing learners' confidence in travelling beyond their immediate vicinity and using public transport.
- Focus on literacy and numeracy skills, given the early age at which some Traveller young people leave school.
- Offer tasters and visits to colleges in order to raise learners' aspirations.
- Gain the support and trust of parents and other community members who will encourage young people's attendance and participation in activities, and promote the project by word of mouth.

Xplorer, Kirklees College

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Background

Kirklees College's Xplorer programme aims to prevent young people being classified as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) when their original choice of post-16 learning has been unsuccessful. It does this by offering flexible start dates (at three different times of year); supporting learners to gain an accredited qualification; and taking a personalised approach to meeting each young person's needs.

Xplorer grew out of a Learning and Skills Council-funded pilot programme that began in 2007. At the time, college managers were concerned that inflexible starting dates prevented many NEET young people from enrolling on courses.

Who attends

Xplorer is open to young people aged 16 to 19 years old and learners come with a variety of career interests and different levels of ability.

Learners can be referred by Connexions, housing or other pastoral support agencies, or from other courses within the college if they feel they have chosen the wrong course. Learners may also refer themselves. To be eligible for the programme the learners have to demonstrate they are capable of working at Level 1 or Level 2: they require four grade E GCSEs for Level 1 and four grade Ds for Level 2. In the first (pilot) programme, two thirds of the young people were male and one third female. Most were white

British, and a small number came from minority ethnic background.

How it works

Xplorer offers the ASDAN Certificate in Career Planning at levels 1, 2 and 3, which is delivered over 12 weeks. This qualification was chosen because it can be offered at different levels, and run in a group setting whilst being tailored to individual needs and abilities. This course is supplemented by wider skills development, which is offered at levels 1 and 2 only.

Learners sign up to both of the following courses:

- 'Improving Own Learning and Performance', which aims to demonstrate to a potential employer that the young person has initiative and can work on their own. Learners develop their understanding and experience of setting targets and planning how to meet them; following a plan and meeting the targets; and finally, reviewing their own progress and achievements
- 'Working With Others', to develop and demonstrate learners' team working skills. This involves the learners developing their understanding of and skills in: setting objectives and planning to work with others; working with others to achieve the objectives; and finally identifying what has helped them and what could help them work better with others in the future.

Based on research with employers and feedback from learners, this combination provides a rounded package that helps learners work on their personal skills, their decision making, and ability to cope with the various transitions they will face in life. These skills are not only accredited but can be referenced in a CV and learners can describe their experiences on the course at job interviews, as examples of work experience they would otherwise not have.

In addition, as part of the programme, learners have the opportunity to take part in an IT flexible-learning workshop. They can also attend taster days at a variety of different organisations, such as other occupational areas within the college, work-based learning providers, and local employers. These are individualised, and so vary from learner to learner. Employers who have provided taster days include a local hotel, solicitors, joiners and a local birthing centre for a learner interested in midwifery. Employers will also come into the college to talk about

employability skills: the manager of a local bank, for instance, carries out practice job interviews with learners. Work experience, and voluntary work, such as with the National Trust, are available too. Learners can also make use of college careers guidance and pastoral support, as required to meet their individual needs.

These taster days, work experience opportunities and good quality information, advice and guidance are very important to this group of disadvantaged learners. Not only do they gain an insight into further learning opportunities and the working world but they also build up much-needed experience and knowledge that they can 'showcase' to potential employers.

The programme is delivered in a group setting which means that different ages and abilities are in the same class. Nevertheless, the learning is tailored to the individual and each learner plans their own individual career.

Learning and challenges

An early challenge was designing the programme so that it focused on progressive outcomes for students whilst meeting further education (FE) funding requirements. The solution was the ASDAN Certificate in Career Planning which met both of these requirements.

Another challenge is working with different age and ability levels within the same classroom. The Xplorer programme is ideally suited to this variety as it allows learners to work at their own pace to meet their own needs.

Currently, the biggest challenge is ensuring learners achieve sustainable outcomes in a difficult economic climate, and central to this is making sure that there are suitable follow-on opportunities. To help address this, the college has broadened the range of courses that are available at different times of the year so that learners have additional opportunities to continue studying without having to wait until the start of the next academic year.

Another challenge is rising entry requirements for college courses, which means that some Xplorer learners who do not meet the usual requirements may have to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in other ways.

Those involved in setting up the Xplorer programme have learned that in order for such a programme to work there must be a dedicated team of staff to provide a tailored approach for learners. There also needs to be 'buy-in' from the senior management team as what is offered in programmes like Xplorer is very different from traditional FE courses. At Kirklees College, the senior management were involved in Xplorer's design so were supportive from the outset.

Xplorer's co-ordinator believes that the main benefit of the programme is that it leads to sustainable outcomes for learners, as measured through a range of targets relating to retention, achievement and success.

The young people achieve because they feel valued by the Xplorer staff. Their motivation and the desire to learn and progress is highlighted by the fact that attendance and punctuality rates are high.

The programme is inundated with young people wishing to join, and it is

Outcomes and achievements

- The college has exceeded all its targets for retention, achievement and overall success.
- All learners who have completed the course gained a qualification.
- Overall, 92 per cent of Xplorer learners go on to other positive activities such as Apprenticeships or full-time FE programmes.
- The programme has increased the confidence and self-esteem of the young people involved as they focus on recognising and building on their own strengths and successes.
- Xplorer recently won a regional award as part of the National Training Awards: the decision was based on feedback from learners.
- The programme has been so successful it has become part of the college's mainstream provision.

currently oversubscribed. The senior management team is looking into whether a similar programme could be offered to under-16s and even to adults.

Referring agencies like Connexions have commented favourably on Xplorer. They like the fact that the programme offers flexible start dates throughout the year, caters for level 1 and level 2/3 learners and is suitable for those who have not yet decided on a career.

Learner feedback is very positive and many have said that they wished they could have attended a similar programme when they were still at school as they felt it would have helped them make better choices about their post-16 destinations.

A learner who has since moved on to a level 3 BTEC National Diploma said:

“I’m glad I completed Xplorer because it made me realise that I could do anything I wanted with hard work.”

Another learner commented:

“My CV looks healthier already and I have taken this to college interviews.”

Closing the gap messages

- Offer flexible entry points to learning across the academic year to prevent young people becoming NEET, especially when their original choice of post-16 destination has been unsuccessful or they feel they have chosen the wrong course and wish to leave.
- Take a personalised approach to meeting learners’ needs. The college, for example, tailors its taster sessions specifically to the interests of each learner which will make them more meaningful to those involved.
- Offer a rounded package of support that combines key skills development, vocational tasters and experience, and structured learning.
- Build up close links with local employers to provide ‘real world’ work tasters and experiences for young learners, as well as to tap into employers’ expertise to develop young learners’ employability skills.
- To push forward an approach that is very different from traditional FE, the buy-in and drive of senior management is vital.

Youth East, Hertford Regional College

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Background

The development of Youth East goes back to early 2008 when Hertford Regional College submitted a bid to the former Learning and Skills Council for European Social Fund money to develop provision for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the eastern region of England. The rural and coastal geography of the region has contributed to pockets of inter-generational worklessness where young people and their families have limited access to further education (FE), training and work opportunities; a problem exacerbated by poor access to transport.

Following initial negotiations, Hertford Regional College produced implementation plans for the five counties that make up the region – Cambridge, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk– to show that it could manage a project of such scale (almost £5.5 million of funding) and complexity.

The Youth East regional model, the first of its kind in the area, is made up of:

- Hertford Regional College as the lead partner
- Five county leads, chosen on the basis of written expressions of interest. In all counties this is a further education (FE) college
- Over 50 provider agencies across the region, comprising a mix of colleges and private or third sector training organisations, selected through a competitive tendering process. All providers have existing contracts to

deliver Entry to Employment (E2E) and a three-year track record of working with NEET young people. The college manages the contracts with providers.

Youth East aims to support 3,006 16–19 year olds who are NEET or in danger of becoming NEET between October 2008 and December 2010.

Who attends

Learners are recruited from NEET young people in the five counties. The following groups are particularly targeted: young parents; young people supervised by youth offending teams; those attending pupil referral units; young people in or leaving care; those with learning disabilities or mental health problems; black and minority ethnic (BME) young people whose first language is not English; Travellers; homeless young people; those with low aspirations and low self-esteem; and those with behavioural difficulties.

Approximately 60 per cent of the young people are referred through Connexions, with youth offending teams and pupil referral units also referring significant numbers. Providers also directly market their provision and word of mouth is proving to be a major way of recruiting young people – learners who have had good experiences on the Youth East programme are telling their friends.

On entry, all learners are assessed to ensure that learning programmes are pitched at the right level for them. Many providers use Basic Key Skill Builder (BKSB) as their assessment tool.

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Importantly, the initial assessment includes an assessment of young people's 'softer' skills – such as communication, work skills, teamwork, self-esteem and confidence – as well as behaviour management, triggers to poor behaviour and physical and emotional health issues, all of which often hold learners back.

How it works

The project's main objective is to increase the number of young people who are re-engaged in learning, training, or employment by adding value to current provision, and providing additional routes into mainstream activity such as entry to employment

(E2E), FE and Apprenticeships. To this end, the college is very clear that it doesn't want 'more of the same' from its providers. Rather, it is looking for shorter, 'pre-E2E' courses from organisations that are flexible, innovative, and open to the idea of learning from others. It also emphasises community-based projects and practical activities that motivate learners and allow them to apply their skills in a real working environment.

The range of activities on offer to young people is vast: pre-entry taster, vocational and work-related workshops; accredited provision for the development of personal, social and employability skills; work placements and visits from employers; outreach work to promote and raise awareness amongst parents/carers; and residential camps. Some specific examples include: young people learning to skipper a boat as a means of developing team-working skills; 'Dragons' Den' activities where young people develop a new product and present it to a group of local businessmen; crime solving, using forensic evidence provided by the police; and gym-based learning where a year's free gym membership provides an added incentive to do well.

Developing and maintaining positive relationships between the county leads and more than 50 providers is paramount to Youth East's success. The College is in regular contact with the county leads and has established various forums for providers, county leads and other stakeholders to meet.

- Five county steering groups – attended by the county lead, the Youth East Regional Project Manager, and all providers in that county – meet on average every second month and the college operates a 'three strikes and you're out' policy to encourage regular attendance.
- Five quarterly county-wide validation meetings review progress towards targets and ensure transparency and accountability.

Providers are encouraged to showcase their work at county meetings, learn from what others are doing, and visit each other's projects between meetings. Every provider is required to develop a directory of their services so that each knows what the others can offer. Youth East is keen to extend good practice sharing across counties.

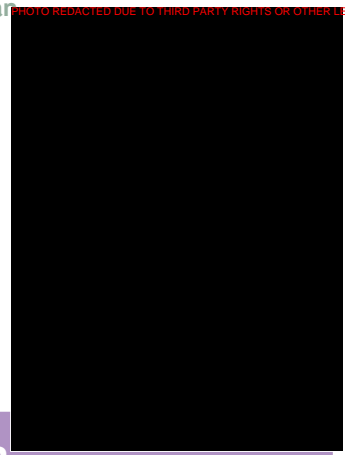
As the project becomes more established, so do the relationships, although the project admits that this has not always been easy. In some cases historical tensions between providers, particularly those from different sectors, can act as a major barrier to joint working. In such cases, the college has been able to play a useful role as an 'impartial go-between' in order to smooth tensions and support joint working.

Youth East views the development and maintenance of existing and new relationships between providers as one of its main achievements. In one case, a college and a private provider, which had never worked together before, have made significant changes to the way they operate so that young people can move seamlessly between them. And in a recent survey of providers, over 90 per cent agreed that without Youth East they would not have been in a position to develop such

Outcomes and achievements

- Across the five counties, the progression rate (those leavers who entered further education, training or employment) ranges from 56 per cent to 79 per cent, and the achievement rate (those who achieved an accredited qualification at either entry Level 1 or 3) ranges from 49 per cent to 92 per cent.
- In a survey of over 195 young people, all agreed that staff were 'friendly and helpful and listened when they had a problem'; 97 per cent felt that their course was 'varied and interesting'; 85 per cent agreed that they were given 'good advice about their future and knew what they were going to do next'; and 97 per cent would 'recommend the course they attended to others'.

- A strategic regional steering group meets quarterly, chaired by the college principal and attended by county leads, a representative of Connexions and of the funding body, and the Youth East Regional Manager.



imaginative and exciting opportunities for their NEET learners.

Providers are also liaising to improve the planning and timing of provision to ensure a seamless progression for learners. Providers are required to take Youth East learners into the 'next' organisation. This helps to break down barriers between institutions and makes 'moving on' a less daunting experience for young people, particularly those who have had a poor experience at school.

Learning and challenges

One challenge for Youth East is measuring the direct impact of the project on the proportion of NEET young people at regional and county levels, particularly in the current economic climate. In Hertfordshire the number of young people in this group is at its lowest for a decade, whilst in Norfolk the rate of 5.6 per cent has neither declined nor increased.

Linked to this are the challenges involved in developing, testing and implementing a management information system for a project of this scale, whilst at the same time getting the project running. With hindsight, the College would have drawn on the expertise of expert advisors to test and implement this more quickly, which might have avoided some of delays and frustrations the College has faced when it comes to reporting.

One of the most important lessons learned is the need for a really good understanding of existing relationships between providers in each county. Whilst the project has capitalised on opportunities to 'build bridges' between providers where poor

relationships exist, some of this could have been avoided through a deeper knowledge of the local context and more robust selection procedures.

Finally, the College would explore alternative management models if setting up the project again. This might include directly-employed individuals, with relevant local knowledge to act as county leads, in order to reduce the bureaucracy that often comes with FE colleges.

The following quotes from providers illustrate the positive impact of the project:

"As [name of young person] gained self-esteem and was successful in her own work she became less disruptive. Without Youth East she would have found it difficult to maintain a place on E2E and would not be much further from achieving her ambitions." – NACRO, Cambridgeshire

"With the support of his family and goal setting, we were able to identify and remedy the life challenges, barriers and behavioural patterns which had previously limited [name of young person]'s potential. He has made new friends that are supporting his new attitude...He has also made new friends in his working environment and Apprenticeship programme." – ITS Training Services, Suffolk

Finally, Youth East's Regional Manager had the following to say about the project's achievements:

"The Youth East project is meeting its aims and objectives by reaching a significant number of the harder to reach and engaging young people in the east of England who are so deserving of attention and support. Some of the successes are indeed

Closing messages

- Shorter, 'pre-E2E' courses for disadvantaged learners that are distinct from existing provision, add value and offer additional routes into mainstream activity.
- Creative and innovative activities are valuable in engaging learners and demonstrating that learning can be fun.
- Incentives encourage young learners' ongoing participation in activities. One Youth East provider offers a years' free gym membership to learners who conscientiously try to do well.
- Clear governance structures are needed, combined with regular opportunities for providers to meet and share practice, so that they develop a sense of joint accountability for success.
- A strong emphasis on good practice sharing can lead to more imaginative and innovative ways of working amongst providers, as well as helping providers to adjust their programmes so that they facilitate smoother transitions for learners.

heart warming and providers should feel justifiably proud of what they are doing to intervene and break cycles of inactivity and low expectations.

"The project still has a way to go to deliver its full range of targets, however I am confident that with the strong provider base that we have we will deliver in full and with significant levels of achievement and progression for these important young people."